Harvey Kurtzman: One final interview

COMICS scene

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COMICS scene

On the Comics Scene

8 **STARRY KNIGHTS**
There's a new Starman lighting up Opal City.

13 **HARVEY KURTZMAN SPEAKS!**
The legendary "Mad" man offers a few final thoughts.

21 **TIMES & TIMES AGAIN**
It's in one era & out the other for this Valiant hero.

26 **IS MADMAN OVERWORKED?**
He is crazy, but then, you already knew that.

30 **CALL THEM STRIKEBACK**
Here's another super-team with a bit of Bravura.

34 **BRAVE NEW MUTANTS**
Scott Lobdell welcomes readers to a "Generation X."

40 **O BIONEERS!**
Genetically-altered heroes are ready for action.

44 **GOODBYE, MASKED MAN**
The Lone Ranger & Tonto ride out to splitsville.

54 **BACK TO NINJA HIGH**
Comics classes are still in session at this school.

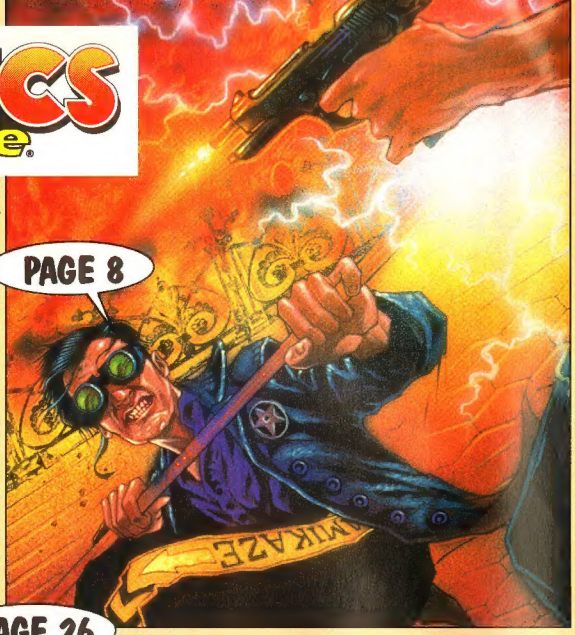
On the Comics Screen

6 **WORD BALLOONS**
Black & blue & crimson

49 **BLANK THOUGHTS**
Damon Wayans is America's blankest hero.

65 **ANIMATION SCENE**
Tis the season to collect awards.

68 **THE REPORTER**
Jim Carrey is ready to riddle the Dark Knight.



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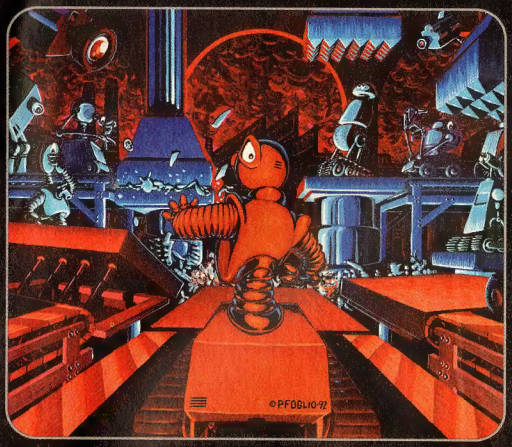

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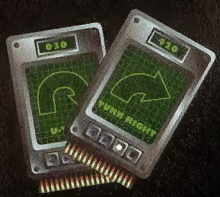

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WORD BALLOONS

Black, Blue & Crimson

Not a week goes by, not a single week—that a shiny press kit doesn't show up on my desk, heralding the arrival of yet another brand spanking-new comic book company.

The press kits are always professional—black, blue or crimson folders stuffed with preview copies, color Xerox covers, business cards, biographical information, testimonials, marketing plans and pleas for exposure. This spirited publicity barrage is often followed by the inevitable FAXes offering even more info and by the truly unnecessary phone calls plaintively inquiring whether those press kits and FAXes ever arrived.

Well, they sure did. And they just keep coming. Like a never-ending legion of ambitious lemmings stopping for directions on the march to the sea.

Many thoughts, lemming-like, occur to me. The first is a rather simple one: Do we really need *another* comic book company?

Not on your life. There's already Marvel, DC, Valiant, Malibu, Dark Horse, Image, Kitchen Sink, Defiant, Archie, Harvey, Mirage, Aardvark-Vanaheim, Fantagraphics, Warp Graphics, Continuity, New England Comics, Triumphant—and those are only the ones the strike me off the top of my lemming-like head. There are countless others—and their absence from this list *isn't* intended, in this instance, as a slight—all out there vying for attention, yours and mine.

Of course, it became impossible at least a year or two ago for any *one* human being, provided he or she also wanted to have a life, to read *all* the comic books produced in America in a month, much less have the time (and money) to buy them all. You would have to be independently wealthy with lotsa hours for leisure reading—sort of a Bruce Wayne type forced flat on your back (so to speak) with nothing else to do.

And yet, the new companies keep coming. Some of them sound quite promising—Event Comics (from Joe Quesada, Jimmy Palmiotti & Laurie Bradach), Bart Sears' Ominous Press, Full Moon Comics (with Deni Loubert in charge of the movie-inspired creations), Big Entertainment's Tekno•Comix (a well-financed line boasting big-name writer & movie talent). Others are just more of the same, featuring contributions from hot youngsters with at least six months' professional experience in comics. Almost all of them have shiny press kits and great aspirations.

Well, I sound rather discouraging and far more curmudgeonly than I actually am. I don't mean to be discouraging (or on the other hand, all that encouraging) to new comics entrepreneurs. I'm just *numbed* by it all. I don't want to open another press kit. I don't want to know about another comics company. And needless to say, I never, *ever* want to discover, thanks to those endlessly-proliferating, pseudo-price guides, what any of this latest horde of comics is allegedly worth. (The single greatest absurdity in the comics field still remains the fact that anyone actually *believes* those price guides.)

Some of these new, smaller one-title companies are publishing what, a decade or so ago, would have been fanzine-level comics. But easy access to relatively inexpensive computer programming and printing technologies allows just about anyone with some dollars and a dream to do their own comic book. And what's more, these comics *look* professional—glossy color covers, occasional interior color, snazzy logos. In fact, the paper they're printed on is often of better quality than that used for past mainstream comics. Gifted (and not-so-gifted) amateurs can now showcase their talents in sleek publications, touted by those shiny press kits in the black, blue and crimson folders.

I'm collecting them all. After all, isn't it only a matter of time before these press kits themselves are worth real money? Think of it—new competing, lemming-like magazines with bonus cards, foldouts and incredibly reliable press kit price guides. And of course, the unvarnished hype will be graded strictly as pristine mint when those press kits remain unopened, unread, unwanted.

Just like the comics they promote.

—David McDonnell/Editor

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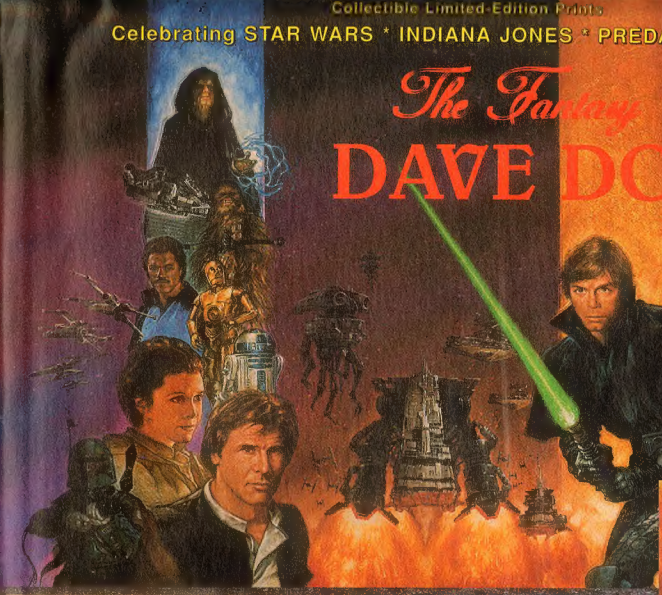

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STARRY KNIGHTS

Writer James Robinson introduces a Starman for all ages.

By JOE NAZZARO

Since playboy/inventor Ted Knight first took to the skies as the original Starman half-a-century ago, there have been a long string of stellar-powered successors. Now, in the wake of DC's *Zero Hour* crossover (CS #45), a new Starman gets ready to wield the powerful Cosmic Rod—Ted's rebellious son Jack. There's just one problem: Jack doesn't have the slightest interest in becoming a hero.

Chronicling the latest chapter in the Starman legend is scripter James Robinson, who recently penned the revisionist mini-series *The Golden Age*. According to Robinson, the idea for a new *Starman* stemmed from his fondness for the original.

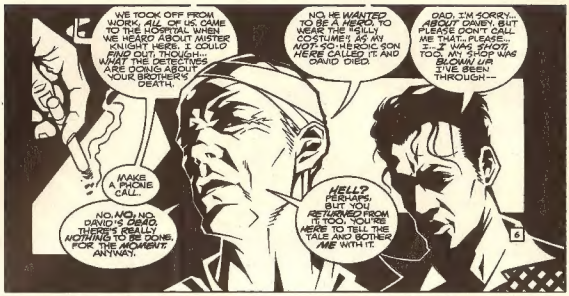
"It really came from me wanting to do the kind of hero I wanted to read," he remembers. "I was looking around for characters that I felt had untapped potential within the DC Universe, rather than create a new character, and I thought about the fact that even though there has been a Starman in the DC Universe since the 1940s, that potential has *never* been realized.

"I looked at the Golden Age stories by Jack Burnley, creator of Starman, and found them dark and mysterious and laden with shadow. There was almost a *film noir* or horror feel to them, which really hasn't been present in the *Starman* mythos since then. So it was those elements: wanting to do the kind of character I would like to read, which is this young, contemptuous guy, mixed with the Golden Age lore of the original Starman. That was really my starting point."

The new *Starman* book follows Jack Knight as he reluctantly takes on the heroic role from his father, following an unexpected tragedy. "Firstly, the Golden Age Starman believes very strongly in his science, as well as the name of Starman," says Robinson, explaining the series' premise. "For one

Art: Tony Harris

Central to the Starman supporting cast is Hope O'Dare, the latest in a long line of tough Irish cops.


WE TOOK OFF FROM WORK, ALL OF US, CAME TO THE HOSPITAL WHEN WE HEARD ABOUT MISTER KNIGHT HERE. I COULD FIND OUT, THOUGH-- WHAT THE DETECTIVES ARE DOING ABOUT YOUR BROTHER'S DEATH.
NO. HE WANTED TO BE A HERO. TO WEAR THE *SILLY COSTUMES* AS MY NOT-SO-HEROIC SON HERE CALLED IT. AND DAVID DIED.
DAD, I'M SORRY... ABOUT DAVID, BUT PLEASE DON'T CALL ME THAT... PLEASE... I-- I WAS SHOT! TOO, MY SHOP WAS BLOWN UP. I'VE BEEN THROUGH--
MAKE A PHONE CALL.
NO, NO, NO. DAVID'S DEAD. THERE'S REALLY NOTHING TO BE DONE FOR THE *MOMENT*, ANYWAY.
HELL? PERHAPS, BUT YOU *RETURNED* FROM IT TOO. YOU'RE *HERE* TO TELL THE TALE AND BOTHER *ME* WITH IT.
6

All Starman Interior Art: Tony Harris/Wade von Grawbadger

When David Knight is killed in action, Golden Age Starman Ted Knight has no one to leave his legacy to but his youngest son Jack.

THIS!
NOT WHAT I EXPECTED. NO, NOT AT ALL.
AND DAMN IT.
I HATE TO EVEN THINK ABOUT ADMITTING THIS--
--BUT...
...IT FEELS GOOD. RIGHT FOR ME.
FEELS GOOD IN MY HAND.
AS THE ACTRESS SAID TO THE BISHOP.
20

All Starman Characters & Art: Trademark & Copyright 1994 DC Comics

A far cry from his father's brightly colored outfit, reluctant collectibles dealer-turned hero Jack adopts an eclectic, vintage clothing look.

"I was very enamored of his powers, which seemed to be very Dickensian," explains writer James Robinson of the mysterious Shade.

reason or another, he feels it's very important that there's always a Starman out there, so when he retires, the mantle passes to David, his eldest son, a would-be scientist who loves everything his father stands for.

"At a very early outing, namely page four of the first issue, David gets killed, and there's no one left to take over the Starman mantle except for Ted's younger son Jack, who takes after his long-dead mother. Jack is motivated by aesthetics, and he earns a living by selling second-hand collectibles—he has a knowledge of almost everything to some degree. All he wants is a life of art and collectibles, but he's suddenly dragged kicking and screaming towards superheroics, which he finds silly and childish. At one point, he says to his father that it's just grown men running around, playing cowboys and Indians.

"We'll also find out that Ted has *always* looked at Jack and known that Jack was the hero in the family. He has a lot of anger regarding David's death that's directed at Jack, because David should have never been in the Starman costume. Jack is the hero, and he slowly begins to realize that he's actually very good at it. As loath as he is to even face the fact, we have someone who's a natural hero, but doesn't want to be. He would rather be buying old velvet pictures of Elvis Presley.

"Coupled with that are two other elements," Robinson continues. "One is Opal City, where Jack fights crime. Opal City is a singular place. It's entirely designed in this modernist style, very streamlined, lots of Art Deco, yet at the center is this rotting, Victorian heart called the Alleys. That's where Jack makes his home, amongst all the curio shops, tattoo parlors and coffee bars, but surrounding that is the great Opal City, which is where he fights crime. What I'm going for is a much darker, shadowy read, with almost a *noir* sensibility to it.

"The villains Jack fights will all have a twisted, bizarre sense to them. For the first four issues, he'll be fighting Starman's old enemy the Mist, but the way I conceived the Mist and the way [penciller] Tony Harris drew him is as this rotting, vile old man, fighting Alzheimer's and old age. He's waging one last glorious war against the Knights before he's no longer able."

ALL RIGHT... ALL RIGHT... POINT TAKEN.
IT'S FORTUNE'S YOU TELL'S IS THREE-QUARTERS IN THE PUTTY. I WOULD HAVE THOUGHT--
DOWN SOUTH, I HAD A HOUSE, BIG AND GRAND, LOOKS AND A NAME FOR IT. THEY CALLED IT THE ALLEYS. PEOPLE WHO'VE COME TO HEAR MY STORIES-- MY WORM-TONGUED TALES.

Much of *Starman* takes place in the Alleys, the dilapidated Victorian heart of Opal City, home to tattoo parlors and fortune tellers.

Unlike his father, the new Starman won't be wearing the garish red and green costume associated with the character. Instead, Jack will have a distinctive look that reflects his love for vintage clothing. "His costume basically consists of a pair of World War II anti-flare goggles, which he uses because of the bright lights—he's surprised that his father never thought of it. That's an implied factor, that he's actually better at this than his father, so he thinks of things that would never cross his father's mind."

There's also a thick leather jacket that he wears. "One of the other things that Tony came up with is that Jack's jacket has the signs of the Zodiac on the back, which I think is wonderful. It really ties in with Jack being the antithesis of his father, and being of a more artistic nature. The elements of the stars that he's more keen to stress are the astrological side, rather than the astronomical. Apart from that, his clothing will be changing from issue to issue."

The costume isn't all that will be changing. Robinson plans to revamp Starman's trademark Cosmic Rod, although at this point, he's in no hurry to explain the device's full range of powers. "What happens is all the rods end up getting destroyed in the first few issues, and Jack is forced to use an old prototype of the Cosmic Rod: the gravity rod, a Golden Age device.

"When there's no more of those left, he's forced to use the prototype rod, seen in *The Golden Age*. It's like a spear with a glowing tip and this he likes because not only can he use it as

STILL, TRY AND PLAY THE HARD MEN. MAYBE THEY'LL--
WARNING HEARD AND ACCEPTED, JUNK DEALER. YOU'RE STILL ALIVE TO CARRY OUT YOUR THREATS.
WHICH BRINGS US NICELY TO THE NEXT STAGE OF THIS NEGOTIATION.
YOU AND YOUR KIND OR HEALTH AND BEING ARE SOMETHING MY SON KYLE AND I HAVE IDEAS ABOUT.
SO ON. I'M LISTENING...

Robinson describes Starman's nemesis, the Mist, as "this rotting, vile old man, fighting Alzheimer's and old age."

Design & Layout: Maggie Hollands

"As loath as he is to even face the fact, we have someone who's a natural hero," reveals Robinson.

a cosmic device, but he can also use it as a staff or in many other ways. Then in issue #5, he gets a rod that's based on the long staff shape, but with hand holds and a more contemporary look. It's a longer, more elegant device.

"The first four issues are kind of a roller coaster, and Jack doesn't really have time to do anything but work out that the rod fires blasts and allows him to fly—but yes, at some point I *will* be defining his powers. I think of the book as being more character-driven than gadget-driven, so I probably won't belabor that point too much."

In marshalling a supporting cast for *Starman*, Robinson hopes to assemble a colorful group of all-new characters as well as a few surprises from the DC Universe. "The Mist family is going to be scaled down to one person pretty soon," he promises. "I won't tell you who, but there will be a new Mist to come along.

"There's a family of Irish policemen called the O'Dares, and I always intended one of them to become a supporting player. There's a fortune teller in the Alleys, who has also appeared in old DC comics, and you can guess where from her conversation with Jack in issue #2.

"Another character who I should mention who'll become a very strong supporting presence in the book is the Golden Age Shade. He hasn't been used in a while, and now I've thankfully snagged him. I was very enamored of his powers, which seemed to be very Dickensian, and I'm going to establish that he's immortal. He had his origin in 1850s London, and hasn't aged since then."

Robinson goes on to explain that the Shade will have a very important role to play in *Times Past*, a recurring feature in *Starman*. "Tony Harris is doing superb art, but he's averaging 10 issues a year, so instead of cobbling together fill-ins, I'm doing these special issues which will have the subheading of *Times Past*.

"These stories will serve two purposes. One will be to chronicle Opal City. The other is to recount the adventures of some of the past Starmen, as well as other protagonists, in plots which have direct links to present-day continuity. As a result, we'll see some characters who are no longer with us.

"What I'm going to explain is that since the Shade came to Opal City, he has been documenting it in these large journals, which he gives to Jack to read. We don't know why he's writing them, but as a result, we get to see the first lawmen who walked the streets of Opal City in the 1900s, we get to see the ghost who haunts the Alleys and we get to see the hanging of that man. These are all obscure DC characters we're talking about.

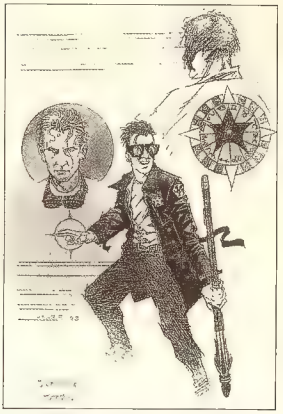
"The other thing about *Times Past* is that I'll be using friends of mine who are perhaps too busy to commit to anything long-term, but enjoy the idea of drawing a nice, fun little story for me. The first one will be a Victorian adventure with the Mist by Teddy Kristiansen, followed by a Golden Age Starman by Paul Grist.

"Down the line we've talked about Tim Bradstreet possibly doing a Western issue, and Craig Hamilton doing a '70s Starman adventure, with the blue alien Starman, where everything is sideburns and platform shoes; like a science fiction version of *Carlito's Way*. I'm trying to come up with stories that suit the artists, so there's a logic to the whole thing, visually as well as dramatically."

Although *Starman* is being solicited as one of several "*Zero Hour* books," Robinson is quick to point out that readers *won't* have to read all those endless crossover titles to follow Jack Knight's adventures. "To be honest, they have told me practically nothing about *Zero Hour*. All I know is the stuff directly related to *Starman*.

"Basically, what you're going to be seeing [in *Zero Hour*] is Ted Knight's last mission. You see the moment when he says, 'Enough is enough. I'm *not* the man I was; this is where I hang up my costume,' and later on, you see him passing the mantle on to David.

"The first issue of *Starman* was actually written *before* there was a *Zero Hour*, so it's material you don't really have to read if you don't want to. If you're really into the DC Universe, then you'll really like how the whole thing flows from *Zero Hour* into *Starman* #1."



Art: Tony Harris

"Even though there has been a Starman since the 1940s, that potential has never been realized," Robinson says.

Robinson credits most of *Starman*'s distinctive visual style to Harris, who'll also be creating painted covers for the book. "We really didn't know each other when we started, but we've become pretty good friends. Tony has never really done a monthly book, and the most he has ever done in terms of continuity was three issues. With *Starman*, he has already done five issues, and he's pro-

(continued on page 60)

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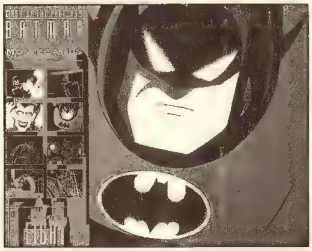

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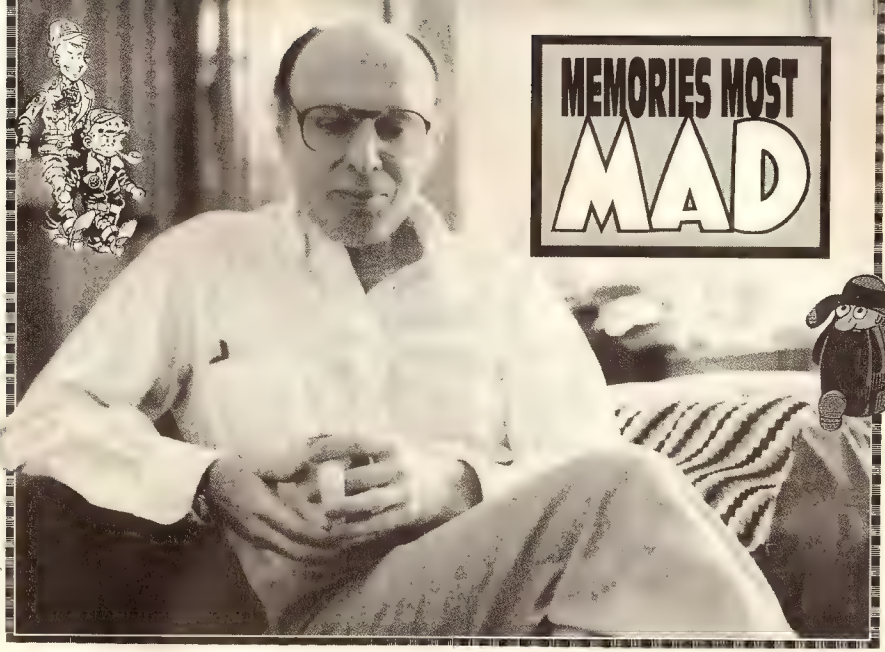


Photo: Steve Bryant

Over the years, Harvey Kurtzman helped create America's sense of humor.

By STEVE RINGGENBERG

On February 21, 1993, Harvey Kurtzman died. The shadow cast by his work across the face of 20th century popular culture remains very long indeed.

In the public mind, his fame rests largely on his creation of Mad, *the comic book and magazine. Before* Mad, *Kurtzman created the rare but much-lauded* Silver Linings *newspaper strip for* The New York Herald Tribune. *He also created a series of hilarious and influential "Hey Look" pages for Timely Comics. During his tenure at E.C. Comics, he was the innovative writer/editor behind* Two-Fisted Tales *and* Frontline Combat, *two of the field's best researched anti-war comics.*

By creating Mad *in 1952, Kurtzman originated a whole style of humor that has been endlessly copied, spawning such imitations as* Crazy, Sick *and* Cracked. *His style of satire and media parody has become entrenched in our culture through* Mad, *as well as his later, lesser-known humor magazines* Trump, Humbug *and* Help! *Kurtzman and Will Elder's lushly rendered* Little Annie Fannie *in* Playboy *added sex appeal to the humor, emerging as a highly influential and often-imitated adult comic strip.*

But the shadow doesn't *end there. Kurtzman is a godfather/mentor to the 1960s' underground cartoonists, both for the effect his wild humor had on their thinking, and for directly encouraging such artists as Robert Crumb. Art Spiegelman and Gilbert Shelton by publishing their work. While at* Help!, *Kurtzman brought Terry Gilliam together with John Cleese, playing a direct role in Monty Python's formation. He also taught at the Art Students League for many years.*

Although his last years were plagued by illness, many of his classic earlier works were reprinted (mostly by Kitchen Sink). There were also new projects, like Harvey Kurtzman's Strange Adventures *(which he discussed in CS #16) and* Harvey Kurtzman's Visual History of Comics. *At the time of his death, Kurtzman was developing a revival of* Two-Fisted Tales.

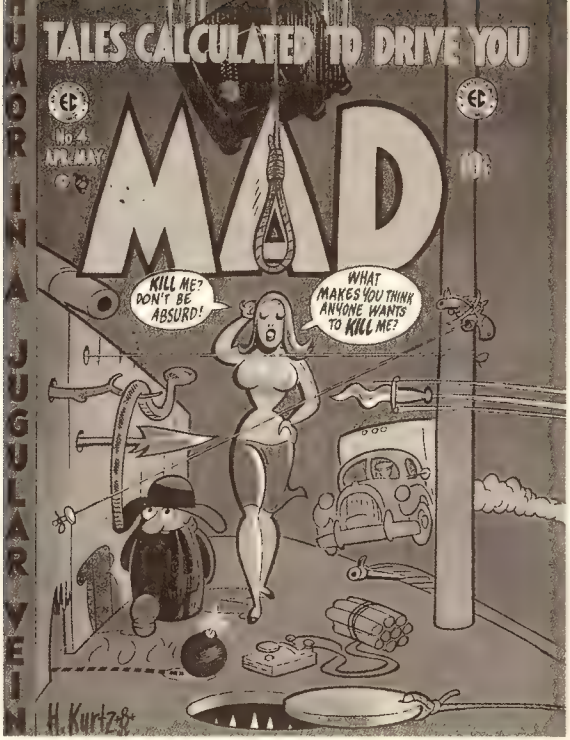
This interview combines portions of two different interviews, including unpublished material from a talk done in 1985 for Heavy Metal *magazine, and a second, never-before-published chat from 1989, conducted as background for an article on Kurtzman's work on* Help!

COMICS SCENE: You've said that you don't feel you're especially literate, yet *Help!* was a pretty literate magazine. Every issue contained at least two short stories.

HARVEY KURTZMAN: Well, when I *say* I'm illiterate, I'm saying that I can't command the language like a good writer will. It's not a matter of what appeared between the covers of *Help!*, because who knows where *any* particular story came from? My illiteracy is my lack of control of the language. I could be much better.

CS: It seems like you've done OK over the years. Your humor is, on a certain level, really wild slapstick, and yet its satirical aspects are often very intelligent and perceptive.

Design & Layout: Luis Ramos



Art: Harvey Kurtzman

Forty-two years ago, Harvey Kurtzman created *Mad* magazine and sparked a humor revolution which endures to this day.

KURTZMAN: Well, intelligence doesn't necessarily exist with literacy. In my opinion, you don't have to be an intellectual to write. [You can be] pretty dumb and turn out a good piece of—I'm trying to think of an example. There are so many columnists today who have a great command of the English language, and they express dumb ideas.

CS: Going back to the old days, what are your most salient memories of sharing a studio with Will Elder, Jules Feiffer, Rene Goscinny and others?

KURTZMAN: I've got to warn you about memories, you know. My brain has absolutely no retentive power, so...good luck. The Charles/William/Harvey studio. There was a stream of people that passed through our doors, and we didn't make much money, but we made a lot of friends. The studio was a social thing, really, and it was a lot of fun. There was John Severin, Dave Berg rented a space, Jules Feiffer used to visit, and I shared the rent with Charlie Stern and Will Elder [CS #35]. Of course, you know Willy's work, the man who really set the zany standard of drawing for *Mad*.

CS: Was it easier working in the studio situation, or was it more distracting having all those people around?

KURTZMAN: I could never work in a studio situation today. Of course, it was distracting; we partied at the studio, we ate at the studio, we met boy friends and girl friends. It was a very social thing. I recommend it to every young, aspiring cartoonist, because it was kind of an awakening experience; we learned a lot about the outside world at the studio. You got to know these people, they were all from different backgrounds.

CS: What kind of background were you coming from?

KURTZMAN: The Bronx. Clinton Avenue, middle class. We lived in a six-story apartment house with a courtyard in the center, two blocks east of the Bronx Zoo. We spent a lot of time in the streets, playing stickball and sitting on the running boards of cars, when they *had* running boards, talking baseball, playing marbles in the gutter.

CS: As a youngster, what comic strips were you drawn to first?

KURTZMAN: I liked them all, I had no single preference. Hal Foster, with his *Tarzan*. I don't know how far back Milton Caniff goes, but he was one of the outstanding cartoonists in my life.

CS: Did Caniff's style have much of an impact on yours, the realistic style that you did in the '50s?

KURTZMAN: No. Well, of course, Caniff was a drug on the market. If you wanted to be in adventure comics, you *had* to draw like Caniff. That was the standard, and I disliked that. I wanted to draw like *me*, not like somebody else, but I did a lot of Caniff in my time. Also, a lot of Chic Young *Blondie*. We were forced into certain patterns by the market and its demands. We were forced to use this style or that style.

CS: By the editors saying, "You're doing an adventure strip, do it this way"?

KURTZMAN: Of course, but that's *always* the case. You play follow the leader until you get enough integrity, and then you *become* the leader.

CS: For whom did you do your first professional work?

KURTZMAN: For my earliest work, I go back to Louie Berstadt, who gave me my first inking job. I was inking *Classics Comics* [later *Classics Illustrated*]. That was my first work. And then, of course, I went to war. When I came back, I did a variety of adventure strips and finally made contact with William Gaines as a result of those "Hey Look"s I did for Stan Lee.

CS: How long did you actually work for Stan Lee?

KURTZMAN: I worked for him for one period, between the War and E.C., and I met my wife up at Marvel. I did the "Hey Look"s and some other horrible stuff for Stan on the basis of requests from on high, Martin Goodman. That was the lowest period of my life, not because of Stan, but because of the Martin Goodman mentality. Goodman treated artists like chairs and tables. I mean, you were just a piece of equipment, but Stan changed all of that. Of course, Goodman was out of the business by that time.

CS: Was Lee a pretty decent editor?

KURTZMAN: He was the Editor-In-Chief, he was the big Kahuna and ran the bullpen. He was the top man. He was Martin Goodman's nephew. Then, Gaines and Al Feldstein gave me my first E.C. work, which was a series of mystery and horror stories.

CS: Working on *Two-Fisted Tales*, did you bring much of your war experience to that?

KURTZMAN: My experiences in the Army had much to do with the kitchen, more than anything else, and potato peeling, but I did a lot of research for the war books. A lot of the stuff was

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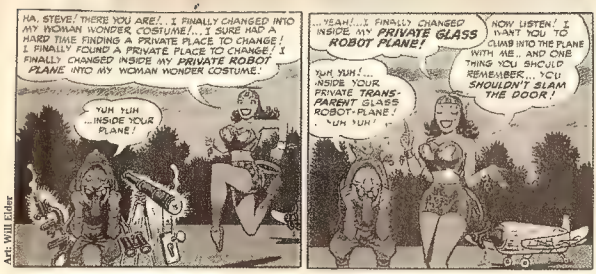

HA, STEVE! THERE YOU ARE!.. I FINALLY CHANGED INTO MY WOMAN WONDER COSTUME!... I SURE HAD A HARD TIME FINDING A PRIVATE PLACE TO CHANGE! I FINALLY FOUND A PRIVATE PLACE TO CHANGE! I FINALLY CHANGED INSIDE MY PRIVATE ROBOT PLANE INTO MY WOMAN WONDER COSTUME!
YUH YUH ...INSIDE YOUR PLANE!
...YEAH!...I FINALLY CHANGED INSIDE MY PRIVATE GLASS ROBOT PLANE!
NOW LISTEN! I WANT YOU TO CLIMB INTO THE PLANE WITH ME.. AND ONE THING YOU SHOULD REMEMBER... YOU SHOULDN'T SLAM THE DOOR!
YUH YUH!... INSIDE YOUR PRIVATE TRANS-PARENT GLASS ROBOT-PLANE!
YUH YUH!

Art: Will Elder

Kurtzman describes studio mate Will Elder as "The man who really set the zany standard of drawing at *Mad*."

authentic recounting of stories that had actually happened, so you sensed research or that background, and it was indeed there.

CS: You also seemed to make a point of covering every service, like the submarine service and the Air Force.

KURTZMAN: Well, we tried to create a certain variety, to make for interesting reading.

CS: Did you ever do a story about the burial service, Graves Registration?

KURTZMAN: No. That would have been a hard one to do because whenever we did a story, we would go to the Army information service, P.R. and say, "We want to do a story on this or on that. The story of Iwo Jima, the history." How the hell are we going to go to the Army P.R. and say, "We're doing a story on Graves Registration?" We were barely tolerated as it was, because we were comic books. I *always* ran ashamed.

CS: In previous interviews, you've said you wouldn't do any more serious material like the war stories again. What if you had a proper format?

KURTZMAN: I would do it *if* the money was there. It's very difficult to do that kind of stuff. Those were all starvation exercises. At the core of the war stuff was hard, grinding research, and I could never afford to do it then, but I did it, and I can't afford to do it now. I can't imagine doing it, the amount of labor involved is indescribable.

CS: In Europe, with the comics stories serialized and later collected in graphic albums, the creators have more time to devote to their work. But graphic novels haven't caught on here that much yet.

KURTZMAN: Of course, it's nobody's fault, it's just frustrating. In Europe, it's an intriguing system, where they run a series of stories in a magazine, then when there's enough, they repeat the series in an album form, so they get paid twice for the same stuff and it makes it possible to do very elaborate, careful work. I think that something is happening here. I think the album movement *is* taking hold. I'm very aware of Denis Kitchen. He's doing quality things. Of course, he's quality because he's doing mine.

CS: What were Gaines' rates like compared with everybody else's during that period? Did Gaines pay you well?

KURTZMAN: He paid as good as he could. I don't remember them [the rates]. Gaines tried to keep up with the best rates, but there was no money. Where was the money to come from?

CS: Gaines was operating on a pretty tight margin as far as profits?

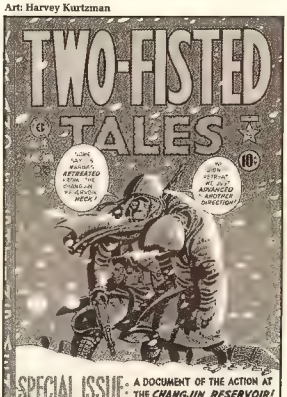
KURTZMAN: Well, we were all operating in a rinky-dink market. Let me express it another way, what I feel about the market and what's wrong with it. When I was a kid, we would have toys

HIGH-TYPE ADVENTURE DEPT.:.. GONNNNNNG!
THE ORIENT! OUR STORY STARTS IN HONG-KONG... CENTER OF MYSTERY AND INTRIGUE! THERE, AMIDST THE TEEMING MASSES OF HUMANITY, FERRETTING OUT TROUBLE... FOLLOWING SUSPICIOUS-LOOKING LEADS WITH HIS LOVABLE ASSISTANT, HALF-SHOT CHARLIE, WE FIND...
TEDDY AND THE PIRATES!
WOOD
AU HE HEY
NO HUM

Art: Wally Wood

Milton Caniff was "one of the outstanding cartoonists in my life," reveals Kurtzman, who took aim at Caniff's *Terry and the Pirates* in *Mad*.

Art: Harvey Kurtzman



All Two-Fisted Tales Art: Copyright 1951 Fables Publishing Co. Inc.

and cheap little candy-store items that were invariably made in Japan. All the junk toys came from Japan, and you *knew* it because they were marked "Made in Japan." They were cheap and they broke easily. They were always very clever, but cheapness was the hallmark of Japanese products. But, after the War [WWII], as I vaguely understand it, the Japanese government was determined to take the "Made in Japan" onus away from these products, so they set standards by government fiat, and Japanese junk was not allowed to be manufactured any-

In the early '50s, Kurtzman set the standard for gritty, realistic war comics with his work in EC's *Two-Fisted Tales* and *Frontline Combat*.

more. The phrase "Made in Japan" became meaningless, and now the Japanese turn out *quality* products. They can't afford to do that rinky-dink stuff anymore.

And isn't it fascinating how we now accept Japanese automobiles, TVs, electronic equipment with nary a thought that it's cheapie stuff, whereas before WWII, it was *always* cheap. And that's the way comics are today. We're geared to a cheapie system, and we can't break loose for whatever mysterious reason; I don't know why. But someday somebody will find a way to break loose, and we will turn out quality products like we *can* do. It's just a matter of the system.

CS: Well, if you gear people to accept schlock, that's all they'll want. But if you give people a taste of something better, that's all they'll take.

KURTZMAN: Yeah, but I want to re-emphasize that making it better *isn't* all that simple. It isn't just a matter of saying, 'Hey, let's make it better,' bing, bing, bing, and it's better. It's a system that supports the quality, and the system started way back with comics, where men ran the industry, and I'm afraid they still do, without any real sense of desire to do anything better. Comic books were always ground out and mass-produced because of the bookkeeper mentality of the people who owned the business.

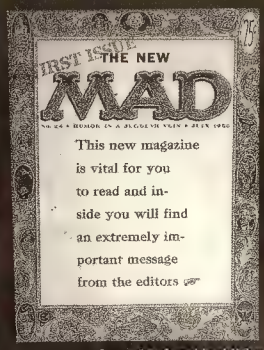
You'll only get something good when somebody with a great sympathy for quality stuff and the power to do it comes along. You get the man, and I'm thinking of magazines that I've been personally involved with—first and foremost, *Playboy* and Hugh Hefner. It was possible to do a quality sex magazine [before], but nobody ever thought of that kind of a format. When I was a kid, we used to see these magazines called *Wink* and *Titter* on the stands, real junk sex books. Then, Hefner came along with vision and talent and turned everything around. Why hadn't anybody done it before? Well, it just wasn't Hefner. On a much less expensive level, we have *Mad* magazine, which I was privy to the beginnings of, of course. And why did it happen? It happened because I had my own vision and I had the support of a publisher, and it came into being.

CS: That was quite a gamble for Gaines at the time, wasn't it?

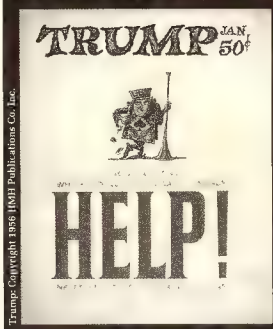
KURTZMAN: It was indeed. As a matter of fact, when we played with the idea, he *didn't* have the money to do it, and we both went to see his mother, who had the money, and we persuaded her to invest in *Mad* magazine.

CS: *Mad* was then an ongoing comic.

KURTZMAN: Yeah, Gaines had a line of comics which were pumping away, and we were having big troubles with the comic censorship stuff, so his comics line was very much in danger.

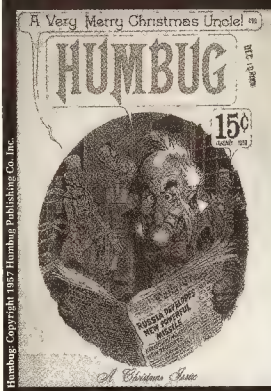

FIRST ISSUE
THE NEW
MAD
This new magazine is vital for you to read and inside you will find an extremely important message from the editors

"I was going to leave *Mad*, and [publisher William] Gaines gave me a counter offer, and his offer was to let me go slick with *Mad*," Kurtzman explains.



Trump: Copyright 1956 HMH Publications Co. Inc. Art: Will Elder

"I had always dreamed of getting into slick magazines," admits Kurtzman, who left *Mad* to create a succession of humor magazines starting with *Trump*.



Humbug: Copyright 1957 Humbug Publishing Co. Inc. Art: Jack Davis

Kurtzman bounced back after the demise of *Trump*, creating and co-publishing the small-format humor magazine *Humbug*.

CS: You were always against the graphic horror in the horror titles, weren't you?

KURTZMAN: Yeah, to this very day. I always had a disagreement with Gaines on the horror books.

CS: In the '70s, you were cartoon editor of *Esquire*, and you ran a few cartoons by Jack Davis and others. But wasn't there a more direct connection to *Mad*'s evolution?

KURTZMAN: Harold Hays, the editor of *Esquire*, is a very good friend. Harold was very responsible for the slick *Mad* magazine, because when I came out with the comic book, Harold interviewed me for *Pageant* magazine. As a result, I got an offer from *Pageant*'s Harris Shevelson, a very unusual editor back then. He was doing a lot of good things, and was talked about a lot. He offered me a job as his right hand, to work with *Pageant*. So, I was going to leave *Mad*, and Gaines gave me a counter offer, and his offer was that he would let me go slick with *Mad*, and I thought, "Wow, a slick magazine."

CS: You couldn't turn that down.

KURTZMAN: Well, the difference between slick and newsprint comics was like the difference between champagne and mud water. That was my dream.

CS: Did you finally feel like you had gone legit, so to speak, when you did *Mad* as a magazine?

KURTZMAN: Well, I *wanted* to go legit. We always had danger two steps behind us. I didn't know that it would sell. I didn't know what I was doing, at the time, as far as success goes. It was just another stab in the dark and it worked. And then, after it worked, it felt good, then I felt legit, but before I knew the sales figures, I *didn't* feel the legitimacy.

CS: You published a number of unusual things in the early *Mad*.

KURTZMAN: I was always running behind because of the amount of work in *Mad*. We were always trying to think up gimmicks to speed us up. And at one time I reprinted some "Hey Look"s. I started getting into things where I wouldn't have to do the work, somebody else did, and we had several gimmicky features as a result. But it was never quite as good as the written comic book story format that I had used and used—that seemed to be my best work. Then of course, when we went slick, all bets were off. I mean, we just changed *everything*.

CS: You were able to play with the magazine format, too.

KURTZMAN: I had always dreamed of getting into the slick magazines; when I was doing comics, I was always ashamed. I was ashamed of the format, and rightly or wrongly so, that was always my mood with comics, and it *still* is. They're doing junk. And forgive me,

Art: Jack Davis

"We were barely tolerated because we were comic books," says Kurtzman, who got story information from the armed forces' P.R. services.

I know there are many people doing special things, but by and large, it's junk.

CS: There's more diversity and more creativity on the market now than at any time since the '40s.

KURTZMAN: It's straining in that direction. The quality stuff has got to come in to place once and for all, and become a respectable and supported commodity.

CS: In *Mad*, you threw little bits of Yiddish slang into the humor, and a kid out in middle America could pick up this East-coast mentality humor without ever visiting New York.

KURTZMAN: I think Willie and I were both responsible for that, because we were the two Jews.

CS: And Elder would just generate the visual background jokes on his own after you had given him the script?

KURTZMAN: Yes, yes. Absolutely. Well, there was no script. I would give layouts, they were large thumbnail sketches, and that's the way the stories were started.

CS: How much of the humor was dependent on timing?

KURTZMAN: Well, timing is everything. Timing in comedians, comedic humor is quite different than timing on paper. On paper, the timing is non-timing timing. I mean, you can sit around and stare at your drawing for a week as opposed to a man who's performing on stage. His timing has got to be real life, by the clock, but timing is everything, and you can create a sense of timing in your drawing. Will Eisner is a great one for timing. He has a strong sense of continuity.

CS: Could you describe how you and Will Elder work up a page, say, for *Annie Fannie*? What comes first?

KURTZMAN: First, I have to get an OK from the Chicago [*Playboy* editorial offices] with regards to story outlines. If I get a go-ahead with the outline, I do my research. I usually investigate the area that I'm writing about. I didn't in the old days with *Mad*, but you really run out, you run dry. You *always* need input to give you material to feed off of. Writers have had that kind of problem since time immemorial. You know, Ernest Hemingway would write a book and then he would have to sit for a while, or go somewhere.

CS: And recharge the batteries.

KURTZMAN: I recharge the batteries, and I've had some marvelous experiences in my lifetime because I've had to go many places and see many things. So after I've done my research, I start writing, and I write out the pages, panel by panel, and I make a large thumbnail of how it is. Then, I hand the layouts to Willie.

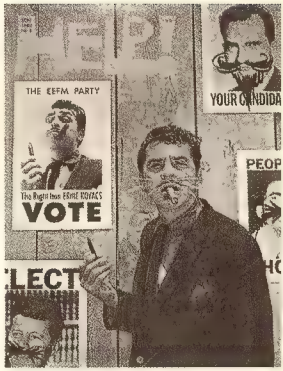
CS: *Goodman Beaver* had evolved into *Little Annie Fanny* for *Playboy*. What did Larry Seigel do on *Annie Fannie*?

Art: Harvey Kurtzman

"At the core of the war stuff was hard, grinding research, and I could never afford to do it, but I did it," remarks Kurtzman.

KURTZMAN: I tried to get help with *Annie Fannie*. I had a production problem, I wasn't turning it out fast enough. We have to do it every issue, or every other issue, which of course, over the years, we discovered was *impossible*, and in the course of trying to speed up, I tried to get writing help. I used Larry, and Lee Eisenberg.

CS: Numerous artists also worked with you and Will occasionally on *Little Annie Fannie*—Jack Davis, Russ Heath, Paul Coker, Al Jaffee, Arnold Roth. What did Frank Frazetta do?



All Help Art: Copyright 1961 Help Magazine Inc.

"Movie people are always hungry for publicity, and they were willing to do all kinds of favors," says Kurtzman of cover stars like Ernie Kovacs.

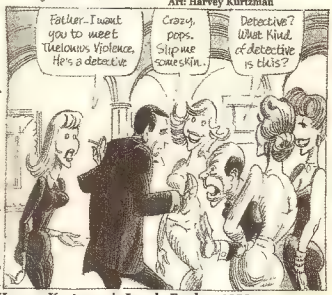
KURTZMAN: Tits and ass, what else? As a matter of fact, he did the most incredible, little insets of Annie Fannie: The breasts, the body, were just better than *anything* that ever came down the pike. I still look at the work today, and Frank's sexual element just comes out like a beacon.

CS: Why didn't you ever use Frank on *Two-Fisted Tales* or *Frontline Combat*?

KURTZMAN: I tried to. Frank was very hard to work with because he was always very busy. People were always after Frank to do things, because he was so good. He was a simple guy, and I imagine the outside world was real torture for him, because people always made him do things that never came out quite as good as what he did himself. So, we tried to use him, and it was just more frustration.

CS: Just your name and Will Elder's name are on the strip now. Does Elder use any assistants?

Art: Harvey Kurtzman


Father-I want you to meet Thelonius Violence. He's a detective
Crazy, pops. Slip me some skin...
Detective? What kind of detective is this?

Jungle Book: Copyright 1959, 1988 Harvey Kurtzman

***Harvey Kurtzman's Jungle Book*, a 1959 paperback collection, showcased the writer/artist at his satirical best.**

All Frontline Combat Art: Copyright 1952 Tiny Tot Comics Inc

Little Art: Harvey Kurtzman/Will Elder/Copyright 1972 Playboy Press

"[Hugh Hefner] was a *Mad* fan from way back," notes Kurtzman, whose *Little Annie Fannie* strip ran in *Playboy* for years.

KURTZMAN: We've been dwindling down. We don't do many *Annie Fannies* for *Playboy*. And we don't use assistants.

CS: *Annie* only comes out about three or four times a year now [1985].

KURTZMAN: If that much. It's just dwindling away. I keep thinking of *Wizard of Oz*, the witch: 'I'm melting!'

CS: Hefner has been very supportive of cartoonists over the years.

KURTZMAN: Well, he does humor as he sees it. I give him credit, I'll never take it away from Hefner in the sense that he has supported a lot of good gag cartooning, certainly a lot of excellent cartoonists.

CS: Like Gahan Wilson.

KURTZMAN: That's the one whom everybody usually names. It's interesting that Gahan has that kind of effect. When you think about *Playboy* cartoonists, you zap into Gahan Wilson, B. Kliban, Rowland Wilson.

In addition to Gaines and Hefner, Kurtzman worked for Stan Lee, drawing "Hey Look" one-pagers as filler in Timely (Marvel) comics during the '40s.

Hey Look Art: Harvey Kurtzman/Copyright 1992 Kitchen Sink Press Inc.

the confines of your budget?

KURTZMAN: No, that was strictly my format.

CS: With *Help!*, why did you go with the anthology instead of doing something more like *Mad*, which was all pretty much in the same vein? *Help!* seemed to be all over the map.

KURTZMAN: We looked for what was basically a cheap format. It was the dollars and cents that determined the format of *Help!*

CS: That's why you used reprints?

KURTZMAN: Sure. We used freebies wherever we could get 'em. We did use public domain at the beginning of the *Help!* series.

CS: How did Gloria Steinem join your staff?

KURTZMAN: Well, she was a friend of a friend, and she had come back from Europe, where she had been working for, I think, the State Department. She wanted to break into publishing [so] *Esquire* sent her over, and she worked on a very loose [freelance basis].

And you, Mr. Bigshot, don't you go for your gun
Gun! I haven't any gun. Those things are dangerous
Well, then don't try to phone for the rest of your henchmen in the mafia
I wouldn't think of it
And don't get any fancy ideas about the Black Hand getting revenge on me or anything like that
Really, Mr. Kolish, you've been watching too many movies

***Help*'s meager budget led Kurtzman to reprint old material and resort to cheap formats like fumettis, this one starring a familiar comedy face.**

Hefner has supported cartoonists, and it's no mystery, he's a cartoonist himself.

CS: Do you think that has made him more sensitive?

KURTZMAN: Absolutely. He's working off of the same vibes.

CS: Why is it that *Playboy* never reprinted the best of your magazine for them, *Trump*, to recoup their losses?

KURTZMAN: Oh, well, that's a painful story that I can't speak about with authority. I don't know what happened with *Trump*. I hear that there was no good reason for us to have stopped *Trump*, and I haven't been given any official statistics, so I don't know. I know Hefner got cold feet, not because of the magazine itself, but because of hard times at *Playboy*. Back when we did *Trump*, he expanded too fast, and found himself running short of capital, so he almost went under. They cut their expenses, salaries and *Trump*.

CS: Doing *Help!* was an idea that came about spontaneously while you were doing the Western book for Jim Warren. Did Warren give you a format he wanted, or did that evolve within

CS: Did any of the celebrities you used come to you because of the connections Gloria Steinem had, since she knew people in the theater business?

KURTZMAN: She didn't know people in the business, but she went and buttonholed people in the business when we had a celebrity problem; Gloria was very quick and effective.

CS: Where did you find Terry Gilliam?

KURTZMAN: Terry came from the West Coast with a bunch of college buddies, and he looked me up.

CS: And he just came to you and you gave him the job?

KURTZMAN: That was mainly the way I found most of my people; we just came together.

CS: How were you able to get established celebrities like Jerry Lewis or Dave Garroway to do covers for free?

KURTZMAN: Well, movie people are hungry for publicity, and they were

willing to do all kinds of favors.

CS: It's surprising that someone like Jackie Gleason did a cover. He didn't need the publicity, with the coverage he was getting at the time.

KURTZMAN: One would have thought so, but nevertheless, we got him. We also got a lot of turndowns when we were using celebs.

CS: Who turned you down?

KURTZMAN: The only one I can recall is Gene Wilder.

CS: You even got the Beatles for *Help!*, retouched so that they were all bald.

KURTZMAN: Now, *that* was a stock shot.

CS: Did it get a good reaction?

KURTZMAN: The Beatles came out with a movie called *Help!* [*Laughs*] It was just a strange coincidence, but those coincidences happen constantly. I like to *think* that they stole the title.

CS: Aside from *Sesame Street*, have you done any TV?

KURTZMAN: Unhappily, I haven't done anything for TV, to speak of—I got close once. I was hired by Dave Garroway to work on the *Garroway Show*, and I sat around for a month doing nothing. Garroway was the first *Today* show host...and Garroway was known for having kind of a wild sense of humor—he appeared in one of his programs with a knife sticking out of his back. I came into the job, the RCA Radio City building, and as I came in the elevator, he came out on a stretcher. He had a heart attack or something. I never saw him again, and they got rid of me pretty quick.

CS: One thing that struck me in looking over all the old *Help!s* is how the magazine really strove for a hip, with-it tone, on the cutting edge of what was happening. Was that where your head was at or was that something Warren wanted, to do a hip magazine for a slightly older readership?

KURTZMAN: No, Warren didn't get into the act. As a matter of fact, as we worked, Warren became more and more remote. We just didn't see eye to eye with the format at all, but I don't remember exactly what our differences were.

CS: What about the hip sensibility?

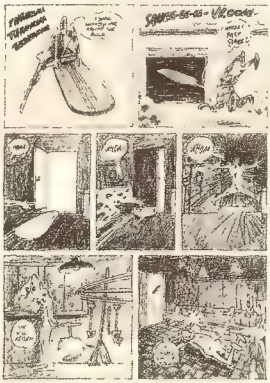
KURTZMAN: We didn't think of ourselves as hip, we thought of ourselves as funny, satirical.

CS: There were quite a few stories dealing with beatniks and the bohemian underground.

KURTZMAN: We were colored by the times, by what was going on. I mean, that's a fairly simple process. And it's very popular today in humor; you write about what's happening, and what's happening is in front of your nose, in the newspapers, on television.

CS: Many of the people you chose to put on your covers were some of the hippest comedians of the time, like Lenny Bruce and Mort Sahl.

KURTZMAN: Yeah, and Jonathan Winters. As a matter of fact, we were dealing with Lenny Bruce. He wanted



Art: Harvey Kurtzman

Instead of writing a script for a story, Kurtzman usually provided a rough breakdown with dialogue written in for an artist to follow.

Art: Dave Gibbons

us to reprint an article of his, which we never did because it was very hard to understand Lenny's writing.

CS: On such limited budgets, how were you able to afford features like sending Gilliam and some other staffers to that civil rights march down in Washington?

KURTZMAN: We did it on the cheap. People would do things mainly for the fun of doing it.

CS: What was the most expensive prop you remember having made? Was it that Sputnik for the Jerry Lewis cover?

KURTZMAN: Well, it might have been. That was probably the single most expensive prop. We spent a lot on traveling. That's where it became expensive. By a lot of money, you know, we spent like a big $1,500.

CS: Once you started doing *Annie Fannie* with Will Elder, around '63, did you have to start delegating some editing on *Help!* to Terry Gilliam and others?

KURTZMAN: There was always the pressure of trying to get other people to do things that I was doing. And, yes, I tried to, I did get Terry into the areas that I would normally handle.

CS: Before *Help!*, you were doing work for *Pageant* and *Esquire*.

KURTZMAN: *Pageant* was very early in the game. I think at a certain point, *Help!* started crumbling, falling apart. I started looking for other things.

CS: Around 1965, you were doing a lot of *Annie Fannies*. What else were you working on?

KURTZMAN: I would think that it was miraculous enough just to do the *Annie Fannies*. *Annie Fannie* was a lot of work.

CS: Was Hefner a *Mad* fan?

KURTZMAN: Oh, sure. That's how we got together. You win your little badges of credibility as you go through life, and I had a collection of badges at that point.

CS: Hefner obviously liked your work enough to give you the money to do *Trump*.

KURTZMAN: Yeah, well, he was a *Mad* fan from way back, and he came to New York and looked me up.

CS: Were your low budgets one of the reasons why you recycled material from *Humbug* in *Help!*, like the Jack Davis stories?

KURTZMAN: Oh, sure. You can imagine the devices that we used, photographs, reprints, fumettis.

CS: Did you actually direct most of the fumettis?

KURTZMAN: Yeah. I used to storyboard them, too. We would have to shoot them in a day. If we went beyond a day, we were in trouble, so we would put these enormous days of work into those things, sometimes from 6 a.m. until 10 p.m. to get the whole thing to fit. It was *grueling*.

CS: Did Terry Gilliam direct any?

KURTZMAN: Yes, he did. In fact, we probably did the last one with Gilliam.

CS: Are you still in touch with him?

KURTZMAN: Terry shows up intermittently. We had a lot of sentimental memories between us. Terry used to live in our house, up in the attic. Terry was starving. He needed a place to live and we had a really dirty old attic, so we gave Terry permission to move in. He hung drapes all around, and turned it into a palace; I could never get over the little work space he set up for himself. He lived with us for a few months, and when he comes back to the United States, he usually comes

(continued on page 58)

Super Surfer Copyright 1990 Harvey Kurtzman & Dave Gibbons

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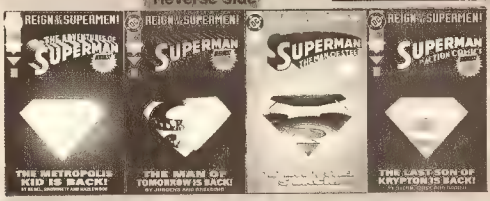

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MARKING TIME

Valiant's Time-walker is a swashbuckler for all ages.

By DREW BITTNER

Art: Don Perlin/Gonzalo Mayo

He's charming, witty, gets by mostly on his brains—I see him as the Bret Maverick of time travel," says Bob Hall, describing his latest project—Valiant Comics' *Time-walker*. Co-created with Bob Layton and Don Perlin, this monthly series springs from the pages of "Chaos Effect," Valiant's latest epic crossover (CS #45), and follows the adventures of the third immortal, brother of both Eternal Warrior and Armstrong.

"The last five pages of 'Chaos Effect: Omega' lead right into his own book," Hall says. "We aren't exactly introducing him, since he has been seen around in the Valiant Universe before; in fact, he turns out to be the catalyst for the whole 'Chaos Effect' in the first place by opening a doorway into the magic-saturated future.

"I hate to say he's the most cerebral of the three, because he's as much a man of action as they are, and deep thinking isn't something he does often. He's sort of a con man," Hall continues, noting that while Ivar can travel from era to era using the mysterious "time arcs," he can't control his destination—and must think on his feet in order to survive. "Ivar has a gadget called the tachyon compass to help him out, but he doesn't know how it works. Usually, he's wearing an earring that's part of the compass; it basically gives him a two-minute warning before a time arc arrives."

"One thing the readers will see is that the time arcs don't just happen around this guy, they seek him out," adds Perlin, a veteran artist and one of Valiant's mainstays. "They grab him and yank him out of wherever he is, which ticks him off sometimes, especially if he likes where he is."

This lack of control over his time-hopping will be one of the series' main elements, as Ivar struggles to learn how to navigate through time. His reasons are more than just the obvious ones.

"Naturally, just like we have favorite vacation spots, Ivar has times and places he really likes," Hall says. "The love of his life is in ancient Egypt, and he wants to get back there. In issues #2 and #3, we see him start this personal quest to learn how to control where he goes."

To accomplish this goal, Ivar's ally, Mac, experiments with the tachyon compass, trying to fathom its secrets, while Ivar uses the "trial-and-error" approach.

"There's an ongoing character, Mac, who isn't always the same guy—there are generations of Macs and they pretty much look the same, all working to help Ivar," Hall says. "He leaves the tachyon compass with Mac and hopes there has been some progress by the time he gets back."

"It is sort of like leaving your dry cleaning and hoping the store is there when you come back," Perlin adds.

Art: Jim Calfiore/Gonzale Maya/Colors: Mark Czaszar

"He's Ferdinand Magellan, Sir Francis Drake, Errol Flynn, all those guys in one package," says writer Bob Hall of Valiant's new time-tripping hero, Timewalker.

"In our first issue," Hall says, "he encounters Vespasian, a Roman officer who later becomes emperor. Vespasian sees Ivar and rages at him, 'I swore I would kill you the next time we met!' Ivar has no idea who this guy is or what happened to get him angry—he hasn't gone through that set of experiences yet! But whatever he did in the future, it's caught up with him now."

Just as he has allies scattered throughout time, Ivar discovers that he also has enemies—enemies with the power to travel through time as well.

"There is an 'Eternal Nemesis,' " Hall confirms. "This bad guy's suited to *Timewalker* and he'll be in play, probably in the background, sometime in the series' first half-year."

The first issue, as noted, lands Ivar in ancient Rome, where he encounters Vespasian and prevents the rape of a woman in ancient Britain. He escapes from an entire legion by jumping into a time arc, only to land near a roadway being used by a Nazi convoy. Issue #2 takes Ivar for a quick tour of Nazi Germany before leaving him at the Charge of the Light Brigade.

With the fast-paced life he lives, Ivar doesn't have much time to brood about his situation. Instead, he's pragmatic about time travel, focusing his attention on the essentials of survival instead of the philosophy behind it.

"This will be a very gradual process," Hall says. "He won't suddenly go, 'So that's how you do it!' and zip anywhere he likes. Control is going to be very difficult to achieve, and won't be 100 percent even when he has a handle on it. I don't like having characters who are absolutely, totally in control of their abilities every second; that's boring. It's one of the things I like about *Shadowman* [which Hall writes and pencils]—Jack doesn't really control his abilities, and he knows it. That uncertainty keeps him on his toes, and Ivar's in the same boat. Even when he learns a little about navigating in time, he won't do it perfectly.

"He might shoot for 1591 and end up in 1951, or try to reach Macon, Georgia, and end up in Soviet Georgia. Ultimately, we'll see him make progress—who knows, we could end up changing the book's title to *Timemaster*. But that's a long ways down the road. Heck, we haven't even explained where the tachyon compass came from or what the time arcs are all about—and those are things we'll get into as the series goes on."

"Got to learn to walk before you can run," Perlin says. "The book is *TIMEWALKER*."

Before he masters the intricacies of navigation, Ivar will have to become accustomed to the oddities of paradox.

Art: Wendel/Ralph Reese

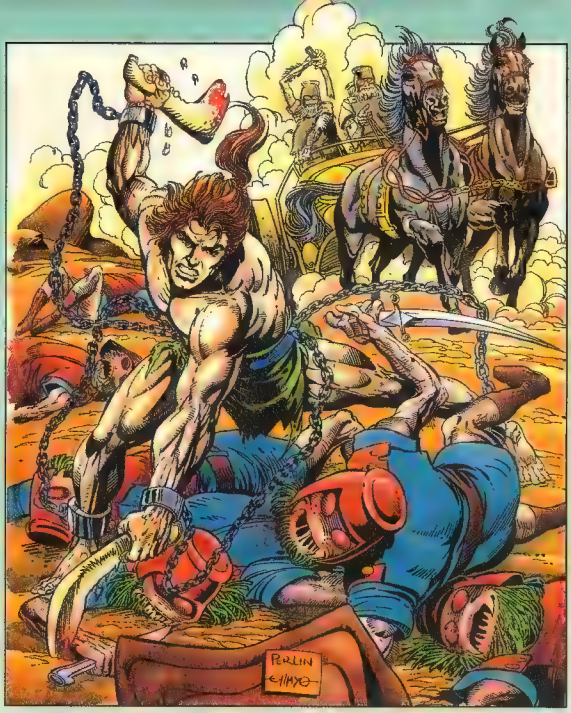
Below: It was Ivar who sparked the events of Valiant's "Chaos Effect" crossover by unleashing Darque energy spawned by the necromancers of the far future.

His earring, a piece of his tachyon compass, helps him learn local languages interactively, but not immediately. "It isn't like *Star Trek*," Hall says. "He has to spend time working through a language to get it down. Bob Layton suggested there should be 'key words' that he has to hear, like 'tree,' 'man,' 'house,' to get the language program running, and that's what we did."

An example of his attitude in action is an encounter with Magnus prior to that hero's visit to the 20th century. Ivar's advice is quite pragmatic.

"He suggests that Magnus take along chewing gum, because the natives he has visited love it, and a flashlight with extra batteries," Hall laughs. "Magnus wants to know things like how his trip could affect the course of history, what he should do to avoid hurting his future, and Ivar's busy telling him what to pack and what sights to see while he's there. Ivar doesn't philosophize much about what he does."

This attitude is in accord with Hall's own beliefs. "I don't like the idea of fate, with everything being predestined. If that's true, nothing I do or say matters, and I hate that idea. Ivar *will* change history in some ways; we have ideas for stories that have him making major differences, sometimes by accident and sometimes on purpose. If he showed up at Abraham Lincoln's assassination, he might try to stop John Wilkes Booth—who wouldn't? I won't cheat the reader by saying, 'That creates an alternate timeline.' No way. That's a cheat, because then the hero's efforts *don't* matter. This is something we'll be playing with, the notion that history has fundamentally stayed the same, but there are details, both known and unknown, that Ivar will change. It'll be the history we think we know, only it may not have happened the way we thought it did.



Design & Layout: Jim McLernon

Art: Don Perlin/Gonzalo Mayo

Ah, the uncertainties of time travel. You could dine with Albert Einstein or watch Pablo Picasso paint...or you could end up chained to one of these guys.

"I don't want to make each issue a history lesson, even though I love history," Hall cautions. "But, each issue will be as historically accurate as I can make it. I won't fudge history beyond the story—it'll be the real thing, except when Ivar affects things."

For his part, Perlin says that the detail and research involved in creating *Timewalker* are what attracted him to the project. "I *hate* drawing ordinary superhero stuff," he confesses. "Big muscles, skintight longjohns, little heads and huge guns never went over

Photos Courtesy Valiant

Chronicling Ivar's trial-and-error time travels are writer Bob Hall, penciller Don Perlin and inker Gonzalo Mayo.

Art: Don Perlin/Gonzalo Mayo

Describing his hero, Hall says, "He's charming, witty, gets by mostly on his brains—I see him as the Bret Maverick of time travel."

big with me. I always enjoyed doing art with reference; you pick up tidbits nobody notices, but you know they're there. For the Roman outfits and armor and stuff in the first issue, I had to find all kinds of books on what they wore and the buildings they built. One thing that helped a great deal was an archaeological group that re-create their own Roman legion; they make up clothing like the Romans, march on the old roads and eat what the legionnaires ate on campaign.

Art: Bob Layton/Tom Ryder

"With *Timewalker*, we can do any story anywhere," he says. "I talked with Bob Hall about doing a 1920s bootlegger story set in my hometown of Brooklyn, and we're going to do a Western. I'm learning so much as I draw this book, and it's so much fun. I think we have something great, something that'll pull readers away from that superhero stuff and open their eyes."

Hall agrees that *Timewalker* gives them unlimited freedom for storytelling. "I would *love* to do a Buck Rogers-style story where we see an Art Deco future, because our vision of the future changes over generations," he says. "The stuff that women are wearing now was unthinkable when I was a kid. I want to play with that idea, that the look of the future changes according to our current ideas.

"We can do just about anything. I would say that there isn't a story we categorically could not do—Ivar might wind up at the Crucifixion, for instance—because I think that *any* story we tackle would prove itself, in the writing and the art. That's part of *Timewalker*'s appeal, that freedom."

Each of the three immortal brothers embody "larger-than-life" qualities of mythological heroes. "They're us. They're not beyond us or above us; in their own ways, they're what we would like to be if we were immortal. Gilad [the Eternal Warrior] is every soldier who ever lived," Hall explains. "His age and experience—and immortality—make him the best fighting man of all time. There isn't anyone alive who has seen more combat than Gilad, or been to more trouble spots, trying to make a difference through personal action. He seeks out these situations. Being the 'fist and steel of the Earth' is his self-appointed role.

"Armstrong, on the other hand, isn't just a carouser, he's God's own drunk. He's the ultimate *bon vivant* and aesthete. He appreciates art and beauty, fine food and drink, gambling and games; he's a guy who lives life as vividly and passionately as he can. I could try to live like Armstrong, but I wouldn't last six months."

Which leaves Ivar.

"Ivar is the adventurer, the explorer," Hall notes. "He's Ferdinand Magellan, Sir Francis Drake, Errol Flynn, all those guys in one package. He's the greatest fencer who ever lived, having studied all these techniques down through the ages, and loves every second of it. He's the ultimate 'live for the moment' man, because each second could be the last he spends in

(continued on page 58)

"I hate drawing ordinary superhero stuff," confesses Perlin. The Timewalker is another one of Valiant's not-too-superheroish heroes.

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It's a MADMAN World!

Taking his place in the hall of Legend, Michael Allred strikes loony gold.

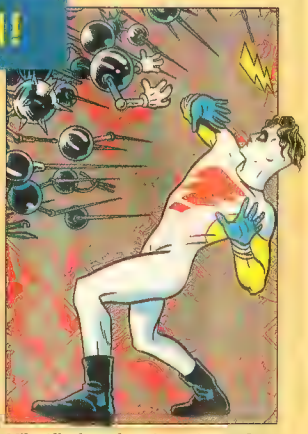
By DARCY SULLIVAN

How cool is Michael Allred's Madman? Cool enough to attract 50 artists for the Madman card series, from mainstream biggies like Jack Kirby and Steve Rude to alternative darlings like Pete (*Hate*) Bagge and Seth (*Palooka-Ville*).

How keen is *Madman Comics*?

"Way-keen!" At least according to the blurb that Frank Miller supplied for the first issue's ads. And Miller put his money where his quote was this April, when he and his fellow Legend members asked Allred to join their impressive creator-owned imprint.

How hot is *Madman Comics*?



Mike Allred says he strives to jam-pack *Madman* with "romance, adventure, Westerns, SF, horror and everyday stuff."

For the third *Madman* series, "Frank Einstein mellowed into a gentle goof, swooning over his girl friend," explains Allred.

Hot enough to jump into the top 100 most-ordered books for April with its first Dark Horse issue—a surprising leap for a hero and a creator whose background lay in indie comics.

How happy is Michael Allred?

These days, you would have to drag him off "Cloud Nine" just to ask. "So many great things have happened, I'm terrified something horrible will happen to make up for it," says Allred.

You can forgive Allred for being a bit stunned: His two previous *Madman* series, in 1992, proved that critical applause won't necessarily whip up sales. Allred credits Dark Horse—in particular publisher Mike Richardson, sales and marketing VP Lou Bank and *Madman* editor/Allred pal Bob

Schreck—with pushing *Madman Comics* into the foreground.

"It's like the curtain is being raised," says Allred. "Before, it was like the orchestra was tuning up. I just got back from Wonder Con in Oakland, where I signed more books than I have in the last five years."

Allred isn't the only one caught off-guard by *Madman Comics*' left-field success. After all, Madman's adventures are several shades lighter in tone than just about any other superguy's. Mutated beatniks constitute the main threat in *Madman Comics* #1—only our buddy Madman could be imperiled by obscure hipster lingo. And when Madman fired a gun off the cover of that issue, it wasn't a Liefeldesque grenade launcher: It was one of those plastic space disc guns beloved by squirrelly younger brothers everywhere.

Madman himself isn't the psychopathic kinkoid his name might suggest, and the 1990s superhero code might demand. He's a sweet-tempered amnesiac named Frank Einstein, who has a face full of scars (mad scientists resurrected him after a car crash), a heart full of wonder (he confronts new menaces with "Gosh!") and a closet full of costumes (he rarely wears the same one twice). *Playful* would best describe his exploits.

The all-ages sensibility comes easily for Allred, a father of three whose earlier comics were altogether darker. "I was doing fairly esoteric, semi-underground work before," says Allred, referring to books like *Grafique Musique, Dead Air, Creatures of the Id* and *The Everyman*. "When my eldest son wanted to take some of my work to school for show-and-tell, I said, 'Uh, I'm not sure if they would *like* it.'

"I realized I wasn't really enjoying it that much either. I thought about the comics I loved, like Jack Cole's *Plastic Man*, *The Fox*, Matt Wagner's *Grendel*, Bernie Mireault's *The Jam*, the old *Fantastic Four*...I wanted to do something in that spirit."

When Tundra published *Madman* #1 in 1992, though, its hero wasn't quite his modern happy-go-lucky self. He sometimes behaved like, well, like a madman, at one point yanking out someone's eyeball and popping it in his mouth. Still, the three-issue, two-color series had its wacky side. Madman bopped the naughty with a yo-yo, and danced the Batusi, the swim and the jerk in the flip-action corners.

The second three-issue series, *Madman Adventures*, had day-glo color from Laura Allred, Michael's wife, a former art major and lifelong painter who manages a jewelry shop full-time. Allred calls the series "a burst of enlightenment—I was doing

WHO WOULD YOU SAY IS THE MASTERMIND BEHIND ALL THIS?
OOH, BE CAREFUL YOU DON'T DESERT ANYWHERE NEAR THAT PLANET TO BE.
YEAH MAN, WE'RE JUST NOT DOIN' THAT.
YOU WERE TO BE OUR GUIDE INTO BOOGIN-OP.
OKAY, STREET DESERTS IT.

In the esoterica-filled world of *Madman*, the bad guys are more likely to be pesky subterranean beatniks than world-conquering supervillains.

exactly what I wanted to do." No more eyeball munchies—Frank Einstein mellowed into a gentle goof, swooning after his girl friend, the freckly Joe, while tussling with robots, dinosaurs, secret agents and ghost tribes.

Unlike *Madman, Madman Adventures* wasn't intended as a trilogy; the back of #3 plugged the next issue's story, "Horror on the High Seas." But then-publisher Kevin Eastman sold Tundra, his money-losing "alternative" imprint, to Kitchen Sink, a bastion of

Rampaging robots busting up the place, fighting an invisible woman and a green-skinned alien? Yep, just another day in the mad scientist's lab.

Design & Layout: Maggie Hellands

"His work has personality," states fellow Legend creator Frank Miller. "That's something that's missing from all the company-owned heroes."

independent comics. Allred says other companies courted him while he waited for Kitchen Sink's offer, and there was even talk of a special Image imprint to publish the book.

The best offer came from Dark Horse; Allred says he consulted with Eastman before accepting, "because he really did right by me. Kevin said to do what was best for me and the book." Once Allred signed, Dark Horse blitzed the market with *Madman* promo pieces, retailer contests and such hoopla.

"Retailers looked at Kitchen Sink/Tundra as artsy, and appealing to a little more selective crowd," says Allred (for "more selective," read "smaller"). "On the other hand, working with Kitchen Sink/Tundra probably gave Madman an extra push of respectability."

Madman Comics doesn't really belong with alternative comics. Allred's model is closer to the mainstream circa the early 1960s; the lighter touches of Silver Age Marvel comics come to mind when Madman takes the bus or realizes he's getting a bit stinky under his costume. The Stan Lee/Kirby *Fantastic Four* is a special favorite—Allred subtitled his book "The World's Snappiest Comic Magazine" in an homage, and says he wants to do 102 issues, to match Kirby's daunting *FF* run.

Allred sees *Madman Comics* as a real "shotgun" kind of comic, managing to hit "romance, adventure, Westerns, SF, horror and everyday stuff. Everything I like will find its way into this book." He has fun tromping through the genres of his youth, and he has an aficionado's eye for kitsch: With its bongo drums, bouffant hairdos and joy buzzers, *Madman Comics* is best read by the light of a lava lamp.

It's not all high-camp hijinks and retro-chic, though. Allred paces his stories with quiet moments and that lost commodity, character development. "I may do five issues of people sitting around talking about what they watched on TV," he says. "But man, when that sixth issue is a bite-your-toenails adventure, it means that much more."

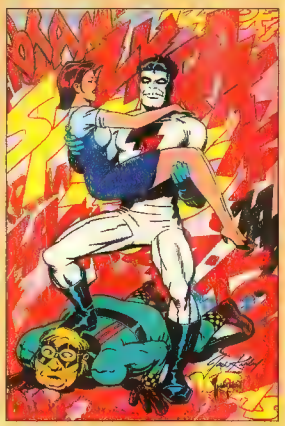
One good example of Allred's soulful side took place in *Madman Adventures* #3. On a camping trip gone awry, Madman went a tad transcendental, grooved to the mystical Who song "Pure and Easy" and asked an alien being, "Do you believe in God?" (The alien said "Yes.")

Madman's philosophical turn came from Allred's own life. "When I was four years old," he recalls, "I went to bed, looked up at the stars and thought, 'This is the beginning of my forever.' " As he began pondering his place in the infinite, he says, "My mind opened up to eternity, and all I could do was scream. My mother came in and comforted me by talking about what I would be doing the next day. It made me realize that existence is about what's happening *now*."

The period following *Madman Adventures* was fruitful for Allred. *Madman* won a Harvey Award for Best New Series of 1993. Allred hooked up with Dark Horse, which is not far from Allred's home in Eugene, Oregon. He gained additional exposure in the industry by pencilling DC's *Sandman* #54, a trippy affair involving the 1970s misfire Prez (the first teenage president); he and Laura provided the art for Vertigo's *The Geek*, starring another old DC "hippie" character. (The *Sandman* issue was particularly satisfying—editor Karen Berger had turned Allred down before, as reported in the Allred interview in CS #26.)

And, around the time *Madman Comics* #1 appeared, Allred was invited to join Legend. He was already chums with most of the Legendaires, who include Miller, John Byrne, Mike Mignola, Art Adams, Geof Darrow, Dave Gibbons and Paul Chadwick.

Miller says the idea to enlist Allred started with Adams, and the rest of the roster enthusiastically agreed. "His work has personality," says Miller, "something I've come to enjoy more and more in comics. That's something that's missing in all the company-owned heroes and their house styles." Miller stresses that Legend



Art: Jack Kirby/Greg Theakston

Allred counts among his inspirations Jack Cole's *Plastic Man*, Matt Wagner's *Grendel*, Bernie Mireault's *The Jam* and Stan Lee and Jack Kirby's *Fantastic Four*.

membership has no formal benefits: "We have no business relationship," he explains. "It basically means each one of us is commending the others."

When Miller called to invite him in, Allred says, "My head spun around a few times. Everything these guys had done shot through my mind—*The Dark Knight Returns*, *Daredevil*, *Hard Boiled*, *X-Men*, *Concrete*, *Watchmen*—they had all done such incredible work. At the same time, I thought about all that I had done—which was basically nothing!"

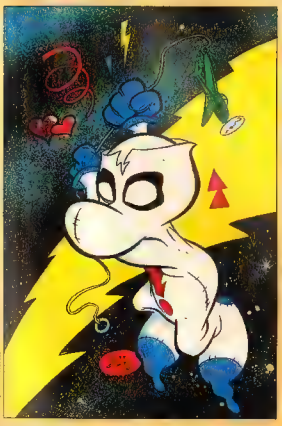
The way Allred got to know his Legend pals is the same way he has met many of today's best comic artists. Since 1992, he has been canvassing the industry, asking his favorite doodlers to do back covers for his *Madman* books. Along the way, he hit on the idea of turning the pictures into a card set, which Dark Horse released in late summer.

This set may be the most diverse card package ever, even though everyone is rendering the same superhero. Even non-comics artists like animator Bill Plympton and fine artist Doug Fraser took their shots at old Frank and his exclamation-bolted costume. "I don't fall into any cliques," shrugs Allred, explaining his wide-ranging tastes.

Not all of Allred's fave artists made the set. "I wanted a Todd McFarlane card, but he couldn't do one in time," Allred explains. "Moebius, Paul Chadwick and Frank Frazetta also couldn't do them in time, but may do back covers." (Allred admires Frazetta so much that he issued a poster earlier this year titled "For the Love of Frank," a virtual reproduction of Frazetta's classic cover for EC's *Weird Science-Fantasy* #29.)

Art: Arthur Adams

'My head spun around a few times," admits Allred of his reaction to being recommended by Art Adams to join Legend.



Art: Jeff Smith

"As I meet people, I like them as much as I like their work," notes Allred, whose Madman trading card set includes work by *Bone* creator Jeff Smith.

Asking the artists wasn't such hard work, Allred maintains. "One of the reasons I'm so in love with this industry is that as I meet people, I like them as much as I like their work," he says. "I was in TV journalism before comics, and that's pretty cutthroat. Comics artists are very genuine."

One guy he *was* timid about approaching was Alex Toth, a particular favorite whom Allred says he has adopted as his mentor. "His work is so monumental to me," notes Allred, "but I had also heard he was kind of mean, and didn't suffer fools." An Italian art dealer named Luca Biagini gave Allred Toth's address. The revered comics artist proved friendly after all, and sent Allred a card picture unsolicited. "We've corresponded ever since," says Allred. "This is very much a highlight of my career."

The card set reveals Allred's

(continued on page 60)

All Strikeback! Art: Courtesy Malibu Comics

By JOE NAZZARO

With a dash of Bravura, Kevin Maguire & Jonathan Peterson team for superheroics.

It's a very entertaining book, with characters that have a future," says Kevin Maguire, co-creator of *Strikeback!*, the latest title under Malibu Comics' new creator-owned Bravura imprint. "There's lots and lots of action, fight scenes, chases; giant monsters knocking over buildings in Hong Kong. I can't wait!"

Strikeback! is the brainchild of Maguire, best known for his pencilling work on *Justice League*, as well as the *Adventures of Captain America* mini-series. Joining him as writer and co-creator is former DC editor Jonathan Peterson, who helped expand the best-selling *Titans* dynasty.

The genesis of *Strikeback!* grew out of Maguire and Peterson's longtime friendship and common interests. "In particular, we're both giant fans of action adventure movies," explains Peterson. "Our real passion is imported Hong Kong action films, which we always go to Chinatown to catch.

"What happened was there was a point where Kevin was looking to re-establish himself, because he had taken time off to do *Captain America* at Marvel, and then I talked him into doing the launch of *Team Titans*. At that time, there was talk of, 'Gee, maybe we'll start another book,' because Kevin was interested in doing something to make his own mark. Ironically, at the same time, I had been with DC for seven years, and it had reached this point where being friends and just wanting to do something for ourselves became the springboard for doing *Strikeback!*"

Unlike Malibu's other Bravura titles, *Strikeback!* bows as a six-issue mini-series, which introduces the cast of characters and hopefully sets the stage for future adventures. According to Peterson, "The initial story arc deals with our two main characters: Rascal and his female love interest, Nikita Dragonryder.

"As the mini-series opens, they're celebrating Nikita's 25th birthday when they are suddenly attacked by Doberman and Rottweiler, the world's two greatest bounty hunters. Nikita is forcibly kidnapped and that sets in motion a series of events where Rascal has to rescue her and also get to the bottom of what's happening. Along the way, he recruits the services of a master martial artist named Midnight Devil, whose path happens to cross Rascal's at the time.

"You also start to meet members of a team called *Strikeback!*, and through the eyes of Midnight Devil, you begin to realize that Rascal and all these other supporting characters have been

You got a problem, tough guy? If you do, Rascal will turn his magic scarf into some hideous weapon of destruction in the pages of *Strikeback!*

interacting for awhile. It isn't a team like the Justice League, where they have a headquarters and go out and fight bad guys. It's really a banding-together of friends who have arranged a systematic way of calling each other when they're in need, and in the course of the various mini-series, you'll learn just how extensive this network of friends is."

"The premise is fun," adds Maguire. "It's everything I ever liked; from Godzilla movies, to action movies, to Kung Fu movies, with touches of David Letterman and things like that. It's really intended as the kind of book where you sit down and enjoy it. If there are at least one or two things in the book that make people laugh, that's great. I really want to make something that's very entertaining."

Strikeback's colorful cast of characters has been evolving over several years; in fact, longtime COMICS SCENE readers may remember a very early preview of the group in issue #26. "The lead character is Rascal," says Peterson, "and during the story's course, we find that he met Nikita during their college days. We discover that somewhere along the way, Rascal has acquired a magical scarf, which, in a Green Lantern sense, can shape itself into anything at his will."

"Rascal was always conceived as Bugs Bunny-ish or even Dennis Miller-ish," notes Maguire. "He's very dry, but this is personal to him, so he's a little more upset throughout the story. God willing, in subsequent mini-series, you will be seeing his true character there."

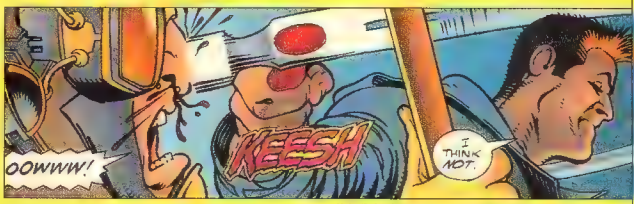
"Nikita is our female lead," continues Peterson, "and what becomes the big mystery with her is that she's kidnapped by Doberman and Rottweiler, whose claim to fame is that they're indestructible. They make the perfect foils, because no matter what you throw at them, they keep coming back. They kidnap Nikita, and in the first issue, you learn that she has actually been abducted by her own family, for reasons you'll have to read the mini-series for, but it goes to the fact that she has a latent power of which she is unaware. That leads to inter-dimensional travel, giant monsters and all kinds of *really* cool stuff.

"Rascal, in trying to get her back, enlists the help of a number of people, the key player being Midnight Devil. He hails from Hong Kong, and has a mysterious past of his own. Midnight Devil is our tribute to Jackie Chan. He has this costume made of a flexible body armor, with lots of tricks up his sleeve. He has a tail, and in issue #3, you find out that he can actually turn it into a weapon."

"Jade Cobra is an adventuress who I hesitate to say is our 'Wolverine' character, but she is the loosest cannon. In issue #2, there's a fight within an enclosed ship inflight, and she just goes hog wild, killing the people all around her. She justifies it by saying, 'I'll kill anyone who screws with me or my friends,' to which Midnight will have some choice words.

"Purity is an interesting character, because just like her name, she's a very sweet, caring teammate. She's in a state of flux, because we're going back and forth about revealing her past. Originally, we had her with the powers of light and the ability to control the spectrum. She's one of the characters I like the most, because she has a mysterious element to her.

"At one point, the gimmick with Purity was that she would be the strongest member of the Strikeback world. She was going to be about five-foot-three, and have the strength of the Hulk, but we gave up on that idea.



Never ones to hammer home a point, the creative forces behind *Strikeback!* foresee a follow-up to this six-issue series.

All Strikeback! Art: Kevin Maguire/Joe Rubenstein

As for the other members of Strikeback, Peterson says they're just as unusual. "You'll meet people like Sherman, who is a bio-tank. His body has been encased in this massive bio-armor, so he's literally a walking tank. He's tied to Rascal and Nikita, because you'll discover that Nikita's father, Mars Dragonryder, the chief villain, actually caused Sherman to be turned into a tank.

"Other members include Short Fuse, whose powers are exactly what they sound like. He's an electrical-based character, and the way Kevin has designed him, he has spiked hair and you can see the arcs of electricity going between the spikes. He also has shoulder pads with electrical outlets on them, so the group can even plug into him at times. Short Fuse is very sarcastic in wit and tone, which plays against Rascal, a very honest and upright character.

"Midnight Devil is our tribute to Jackie Chan, because Kevin and I are big martial arts/Hong Kong movie fans," says Peterson.

YOU DOING?
BLANG
THAT'S IT? THAT'S ALL OF ME!!! I GOT ONE I ONLY GOT ONE.
WELL... I'M SURE HE WAS A REAL TOUGH ONE
TOUGH!? I CLOCKED HIM WITH A FRYING PAN. YOU DID ALL THE HARD WORK.
COULD I POSSIBLY BE MORE HUMILIATED?

No, you couldn't be more humiliated, Rascal. You finally get in a comic book and the best you can do is whack a guy upside the head with a frying pan.

Writer Jonathan Peterson and artist Kevin Maguire pay tribute to the Hong Kong cinema with their bizarre tales of love and vengeance in *Strikeback!*

HEY! QUIT HOPPIN' AROUND LIKE SOME DANCED EMBER!
STAND STILL AND TAKE IT LIKE A MAN YA COWARD!
BLAM
BLAM
BLAM
COWARD!? THAT'S EASY FOR YOU TO SAY YOU'VE GOT ALL THE ARTILLERY!
BUT I'LL MAKE YOU A DEAL. YOU PUT DOWN THE CANNON--
--AND I'LL BE HAPPY TO SMAT THE CRAP OUT OF YOU.
WHOOM
WHOOM
HA, NOT N THIS LIFE, KARUK-SO! BYE-BYE
SHEESH! I CAN'T BELIEVE THE BOSS WAS AFRAID OF YOU. MOTTA JOKE! THAT WAS THE EASIEST MONEY I EVER MADE I DIDN'T EVEN BREAK A SWEAT
NICE MOVE, SLANT-EYES.
WHAM
AAAAH
I MAY NOT HAVE YOUR EYE POWER--
--BUT AT LEAST I HIT WHAT I'M SHOOTING AT
ARRHH!
WHOOM
SLANT-EYES?!?
ONE EYE

"With a book like *Strikeback!*, the charm is in the discovery of something new," explains Peterson. "These are people that you can like and root for."

Now she has these force blasts, and whatever way we decide to go with her will obviously affect her powers."

"Then, there's Pandora, the cat," finishes Maguire, "who will play a very important part in the second mini-series if we get to do it."

Rounding out the cast of *Strikeback!* is Mars Dragonryder, the main villain of the first mini-series. "He turns out to be the Reed Richards of this world," says Peterson. "Mars has his own island base off the coast of Hong Kong, and he has been secretly amassing these armed forces. He has missiles, rockets and all that stuff, and just when you start thinking, 'This is a Bondian villain, out to conquer the world,' you'll discover what we think is a *very* cool story twist, where you suddenly realize that Mars may *not* be what everyone thought."

As veterans of some of the most popular team books in comics history, Maguire and Peterson have tried to find ways of breaking the standard team formula wherever possible. "With established team books, you can only shake it up so much," claims Peterson, who spent the better part of a decade editing the various Titans books. "I was very lucky with *Titans* that I was able to walk in the door and say, 'I can think of about 20 things that could shake this up, that it seems surprising that no one has thought of yet.'

"With a book like *Strikeback!*, the charm is in the discovery of something new. It's a chance for readers to get on board and decide whether these are people they like or don't like. These are people that you can like and root for. Even though we have Jade Cobra, by and large they're not part of the grim and gritty school of heroes. Kevin and I wanted to make *Strikeback!* more upbeat than the average team book, and even with its newness, I think that becomes a selling point.

Design & Layout: Maggie Hollands

"If there are at least one or two things in the book that make people laugh, that's great," Maguire states.

"I can look at many team books out there, and you get the sense that it's a marketing ploy. You think, 'Oh, gee, it's an announcement that they're going to shake up the universe yet again,' but by the time it's done, you wince and say, 'I don't know if there's anything different!'

"The other problems that group books have nowadays is that they're often composed of main characters who have their own books elsewhere, so you really can't change anything. If you put Superman into the Justice League, they'll always have the problem that it's comprised of Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman, Green Lantern or whoever, so if you're [*League* editor] Brian Augustyn, you have to deal with all the other editors, because they control the characters. With *Strikeback!*, none of these people have solo books. If you want to see the changes that happen to Midnight Devil or Rascal, they *only* happen in *Strikeback!*"

In order to give themselves some breathing room on *Strikeback!*, the creators thought it wise to finish most of the six-issue run *before* allowing Malibu to solicit the book. As a result, they were able to go back and fine-tune major story elements. Peterson gives a notable example:

"Doberman and Rottweiler, the two bounty hunters, were originally created to be a backup feature, but we loved them so much that we ended up saying, 'Wait a minute, let's use them as protagonists in the book!' I have to say that the breakaway character is going to be Doberman. Kevin has designed a really striking look for him, his personality is very cool, and he's not really a villain. He's a force of nature as well as a businessman, and once he accepts a contract, he won't be denied success. In many ways, because of the way we're now writing him, he's really an ultra-cool character.

"Even as we've completed issues, Kevin and I have called [letterer] Kenny Lopez and drastically re dialogued sections of the book, because we decided to change the emphasis. As co-creator, I find it fascinating that *Strikeback!* is still evolving. In fact, I often have to kick Kevin, because he'll get excited about an upcoming issue, and I have to say, 'That's really great, but unfortunately I need you to finish pencilling *this* issue!' That's the beauty and also the hellacious nature of having a creator-owned book."

If the first six-issue series of *Strikeback!* proves successful, the creators hope to follow it up with other stories that focus on individual characters or the group as a whole. "Right now, we're debating if the next mini-series will center on Midnight Devil," says Peterson, "because there's a story there we really want to do. After that would be another group mini-series and then another spotlight story and so on."

"I would be much happier putting out six really good issues a year," offers Maguire, "with a beginning, middle and an end; each one interconnecting with the others. The first one is our *Star Wars*, the next one will be *Empire*, and then, *Jedi*. They're all separate stories, but they all tell *one* big story."

Despite the number of team titles on the market today, the creators of *Strikeback!* hope they've put together something special. "It's entertaining, and it has characters that will grow," promises Kevin Maguire. "We have things figured out for these characters that would stretch into at least five mini-series, so I guess that's 30 issues. It's going to be a lot of fun!"

"In today's market, *Strikeback!* will stand as an exceptional property," insists Jonathan Peterson. "It's extremely well-written, it's very lively, and there's an assortment of characters for people of all tastes. Obviously with Kevin's art, you know it's going to look gorgeous, but then you add Joe Rubenstein's inking, and on top of that, you add the computer coloring of Steve Oliff and the Olyoptics Studio, who are the best in the industry.

"*Strikeback!* is as good a package as you're going to find in *any* publishing house this year, and in my own bravado way, I think it really is as good as anything on the market today. It's a strong book, and I hope people will give it a try."

Says Maguire, "It's everything I ever liked; from Godzilla movies, to action movies, to Kung Fu movies with touches of David Letterman."

All Strikeback! Art: Trademark & Copyright 1994 Jonathan Peterson & Kevin Maguire

FRESHMAN CLASS

Scott Lobdell opens the doors on a new mutant team-Generation X.

By DREW BITTNER

A number of newly-discovered young mutants will find it can be a very cruel world out there—and they had better start getting ready for it now. In *Generation X*, the newest X-title from Marvel Comics, Scott Lobdell and Chris Bachalo introduce readers to a special group of youngsters. Although the concept sounds almost identical to *New Mutants*, the title that ultimately launched *X-Force*, Lobdell claims its true inspiration goes much further back than that.

"More than anything, *Generation X* is probably more like *Uncanny X-Men* #94 to #112 than *New Mutants*. *X-Men* was about a bunch of characters finding their way in the world," Lobdell says. "There was this excitement to it—when you opened the book, you had no idea what to expect. That's what we're trying to do."

The students of the new Xavier School for the Gifted, formerly Emma Frost's Massachusetts Academy, are a mixed batch drawn from around the globe.

"Chamber is Jonothon Starsmore and he's from England," Lobdell says. "He didn't have a great life to begin with, and it only got worse when his bioblast power went off, causing him to lose half of his chest and the lower half of his face—with all this bio-energy pouring out of the open wound! It's not pretty. If Chamber wasn't so anti-social, he'd be the most likely leader of the group.

"M is Monet St. Croix. She's Algerian, an incredibly beautiful, super-strong, super-fast and brilliant young woman who, on the surface, appears to have everything going for her. But, we discover she has a secret that she thinks would jeopardize her status on the team.

"Mondo is a Samoan who may well be the most powerful member of the team, but he's also the most pacifistic. Banshee's going to try to teach him that sometimes, you need a more aggressive reaction. But where Colossus was a pacifist who got changed by the world, I see Mondo as a person who changes the world around him.

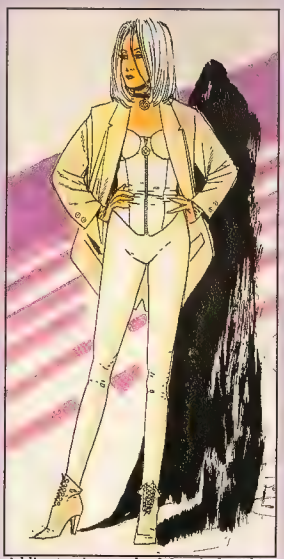
"Skinn is Angelo Espinosa, a Mexican-American who has three-to-six feet more skin on his body than he needs. The way Medusa controls her hair, he can control his skin, making it stretch and contort. He can't stretch his bones, like Mr. Fantastic, so the extra skin is always there. As bad as he looks, and as much as he'll *never* fit in with mainstream society, he's thankful for his condition, because it gave him a way out of the violent life he once had.

"Penance [a Yugoslavian] is the character we know the least about because she's the least forthcoming. In fact, she doesn't speak with anyone and does pretty much what she pleases. Her entire body has altered to diamond hardness, echoing her inaccessibility to the rest of the world. Nobody can get close to her, physically or emotionally.

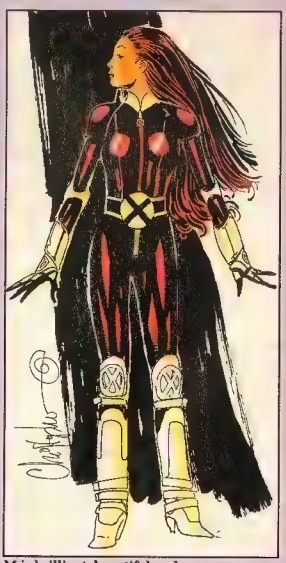
"Paige Guthrie, a.k.a. Husk, is the younger sister of Sam [*X-Force*'s Cannonball] and was raised on a small farm in Kentucky," Lobdell explains. "All her life, she dreamed about and worked toward becoming what her older brother couldn't be—an X-Man. When she rips away her skin, there's something completely new underneath each time. She never knows what she'll become; even though it's her body, it's never the same. She pushes hard to become the team leader.

"Synch is Everett Thomas, from Missouri. He's really self-confident, *really*. His biogenetic aura puts him in sync with any mutant power—and sometimes he can surpass that power. He's a complicated guy. Did I mention he's self-confident?"

"Banshee's goal is to teach these children how to to survive. He's not interested in them becoming X-Men," says writer Scott Lobdell.



Adding tension to school days is the White Queen, who's trying to redeem herself for the deaths of her last pupils, The Hellions.



M is brilliant, beautiful and super-powerful but, Lobdell explains, "She has a secret that will jeopardize her team status."

Synch is just that—in synch with the mutant powers of others. "He's *really* self-confident," emphasizes Lobdell.

The last member of the new school is a familiar face from the other X-titles. "[Junior X-Man] Jubilee volunteers to attend the school, because she wants to better serve the X-Men by developing her powers, which up to now have been pretty useless," Lobdell admits. "She's going to be really frustrated by the group—she wants them to have the same extended family feeling that the X-Men have. It could happen eventually, but Jubilee wants it *right now*, and that's frustrating."

While a leader will emerge from this group of headstrong kids, it's going to take awhile. "Part of the fun in the first few issues is how they jockey for leadership," Lobdell says. "There's a rivalry that wasn't there at first."

Overseeing these X-kids are two veteran mutants: Banshee and the White Queen, also known as Sean Cassidy and Emma Frost. They run the school together, but hardly see eye-to-eye.

"When we were putting the series together, Sean alone was just a surrogate Xavier. We didn't want to go to the other extreme and make him like Cable, so we thought bringing in another character, with a different philosophy, would generate tension.

"I was once told that any time you can inject a 'no' into the equation, you provide conflict for the characters. Banshee is competing with someone over what the students are taught, not to mention the school's overall philosophy. The only thing these two have in common is a concern for the welfare of the new students. Emma woke up from her coma to find that her students, the Hellions, were killed by the Upstarts. She was crushed, feeling that she hadn't trained them well enough to survive. She was open-minded enough to realize that Xavier's students survived where hers didn't, and there was something to be learned from that.

"Readers might think, 'Oh, yeah, Emma Frost—another bad-guy-turns-good-guy,' but I never felt Emma was that bad! Anyway, her personality hasn't changed any more than Sabretooth's personality did when he joined the X-Men."

Having a telepath for a teacher provides the students with some formidable challenges, but Lobdell says that Frost isn't a "telepathic peeping Tom." "She respects their privacy," he notes. "Emma doesn't intrude on her students' thoughts, but she's usually aware of what they're up to. And more often than not, she'll let them do it. We dig into her background, which will surprise many people. She wasn't always rich and successful; Emma used her mutant powers to turn her life around, and she wants to teach others to do the same."

Meanwhile, Banshee has a very specific lesson to impart: survival. "Banshee's goal is to teach these children how to assimilate, as well as how to survive. He's not interested in them becoming X-Men. He would really rather see them have as normal a life as possible, considering their genetic heritage.

Since his background is in intelligence and law enforcement, he isn't big on seeing them become soldiers; he teaches them what he knows best, which is being smart instead of being tough."

By interacting with these teenagers, Sean finds some powerful feelings he has never addressed, such as being a father-figure. "He didn't have such a great relationship with his own daughter, Siryn. These are things he must deal with, especially in regards to M, whom he takes to right away."

Just like students anywhere, the *Generation X* kids learn to play their teachers against each other—with mixed results. "These two are parental figures," Lobdell says. "Some like Emma better and some prefer Sean. This might be the first time in comics where we see authority figures who, a) have favorites, and b) have students they just don't like. Professor X loves *all* of his students equally, though he spent more time with and feels closer to Cyclops, and Cable probably has about the same feelings toward everyone, despite the fact that he has groomed Sam as a leader. This isn't a temporary situation; these kids will be students for a long time."

Students or not, they find themselves attracting their share of enemies. Their foremost foe, Lobdell says, appears in the debut issue, in the tradition of the great X-villains.

"It seems like lots of major X-enemies showed up in first issues," Lobdell notes. "For *Generation X*, the primary villain is Mplate, a variation on the word 'template,' which relates to his powers. He has a major connection with one of the students, and has the rather gruesome ability to suck genetic marrow out of bones; he really loves the bones of young mutants, because they're fresher and tastier. In fact, issue #1 opens with Penance having been a longtime prisoner of Mplate's. She's rescued by Gateway, a major player in the series. He only speaks one word, and it's the only word he ever speaks in the series—'Penance.'

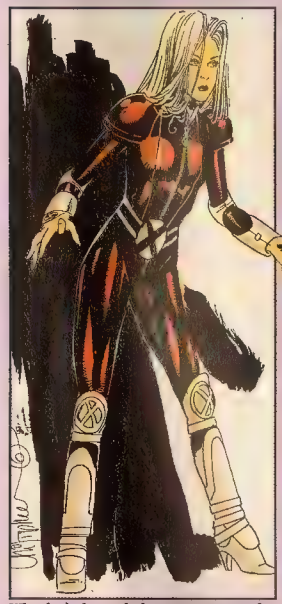
"With Mplate, it's not a matter of sustenance...if only it were! No, he enjoys it. He's a serial parasite of young mutants, and we suggest that there are many kids Mplate has killed over the years. He's a nasty character."

Lobdell says that many of their villains come from the students' pasts, growing from the background that he and Bachalo have developed for these characters. But Lobdell adds, "In the DC Vertigo tradition, an extremely lame *X-Men* villain will return—and *not* from the dead—and be an important enemy for these kids. If only I knew which one it'll be..."

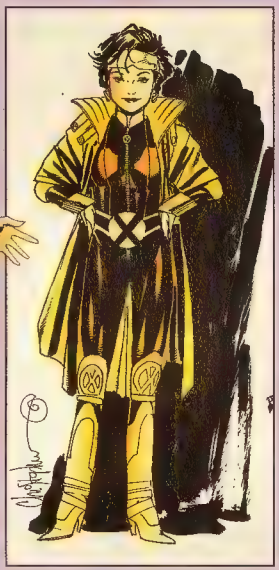
There are no X-crossovers planned at this time, so that *Generation X* can develop its own personality, but Lobdell says that given the interconnected nature of the mutant comics, it'll happen eventually. However, he does admit to favoring one X-Man as a guest before all the others drop by.

"I would like to use Nightcrawler in a story," he says. "More than any of the others, he has had to live with a strange and unsettling appearance—and he can pass his life experience on to others, like Skinn, and say, 'Hey, I've gone through it and survived, and you can too.' His personal life is very relevant to what these kids are supposed to learn.

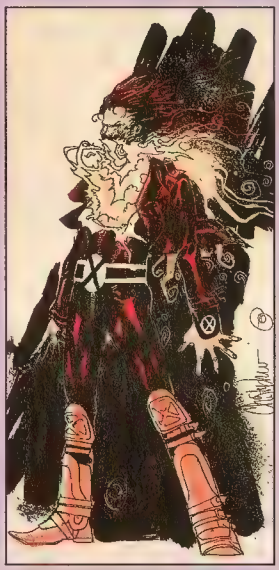
"I can't tell you what these characters will be like six months or a year from now, and I'm not really interested in looking that far ahead. I would rather experience the book and get to know the characters the way the readers do—by seeing them develop gradually, month by month. Some writers have everything planned out beforehand, but for me, it keeps the excitement going to have everything be fresh and unknown until it happens."



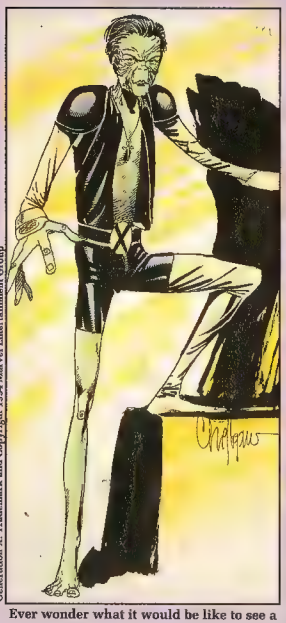
What lurks beneath the cute, young surface of Paige Guthrie? Even she doesn't know what she'll be when she removes her Husk.



Of Jubilee's presence, Lobdell notes: "She wants to better serve the X-Men by developing her powers, which up to now have been pretty useless."



Chamber is a living example of why young mutants need professional training. His bioblast power destroyed parts of his own chest and face.



Generation X: Trademark and Copyright 1994 Marvel Entertainment Group

Ever wonder what it would be like to see a guy with three-to-six feet more skin that normal? Well, Lobdell and artist Chris Bachalo did, and created Skinn.

Having been a stand-up comedian for several years, Lobdell says that the "thinking on your feet" reflexes he learned on stage have stayed with him as a writer.

"In comedy, you go with your best stuff first; you rarely get to go back and rewrite or retell a joke. Part of what kept me on stage is spontaneity—living in the moment. What you'll get from Chris and me are comics that are spontaneous."

The series' artist, Bachalo, is best known for his work at DC's Vertigo imprint, handling art chores on *Death: The High Cost of Living*, *Sandman* and *Shade, the Changing Man*. He did the first three issues of *Ghost Rider 2099* for Marvel before taking on *Generation X*.

"Chris is without a doubt one of the most talented and creative artists in the business," Lobdell says. "We're laughing our way through some of the choreography in this book, because I'll give him the most bizarre stuff I can imagine, and he always makes it look even more bizarre than I thought it could. The perfect example is Mplate. He shows up in maybe 10 pages of the first issue, but we never get a clear look at him; he's not in shadow, he's just blurry, and I have no idea how Chris pulled that off."

Bachalo has been involved with the *Generation X* concept from the beginning, dating back to his work on *X-Men Unlimited* #1. "That was the first time I worked with Chris," Lobdell explains. "We were maybe six pages into that story when we were looking for an artist for *Generation X*. I saw the artwork he did, went to Bob and said, 'This is the guy.' The only person we needed to convince was Chris! He kept asking, 'Why me?' We offered him the book, he said he would think about it—and his wife said he didn't have to think about it at all. So, Helen Bachalo is the one to thank for him being on this."

Lobdell adds that Bachalo's distinctive style, while very unlike the other X-books, is a major factor in the tone and spirit of *Generation X*. "When Bill Sienkiewicz did *New Mutants*, readers had a hard time getting behind his incredible art because it was a major departure from what Bob McLeod and

"He's a serial parasite of young mutants," Lobdell reveals of his villain, Mplate. "He's a nasty character."

All Generation X Art: Chris Bachalo/Mark Buckingham

"Mondo is a Samoan who may be the most powerful member, but he's also the most pacifistic," relates Lobdell.

Sal Buscema had done," Lobdell says. "Chris created these characters, and he has put so much energy and excitement on each page, I can't even describe it. People who've seen the promotional art said, 'Oh, it's dark, gritty X-Men…it has a very realistic feel.' In my opinion, gritty and realism aren't synonymous. I live in the real world and I don't think I encounter as much grit as the Punisher.

"Excitement and optimism are what we're striving for. The purpose the kids serve is as a reminder to the old-timers that this is where they started. No matter how cynical they might get, these kids remind them that the world is worth fighting for.

"The only thing expressed to me [editorially] is that if there are not superhuman battles, there has to be at least a sense of adventure in the book," he adds. "Bob's concern is that the *X-Men* has gotten grim, although we've been trying to shift that mood a little. With *Generation X*, we're going to be taking a more optimistic view of the future than we may have in the past few years on *X-Men*."

Lobdell admits that there is a universal appeal to the mutant titles that transcends both art and stories; the mutants, he says, strike a chord with readers because they are us.

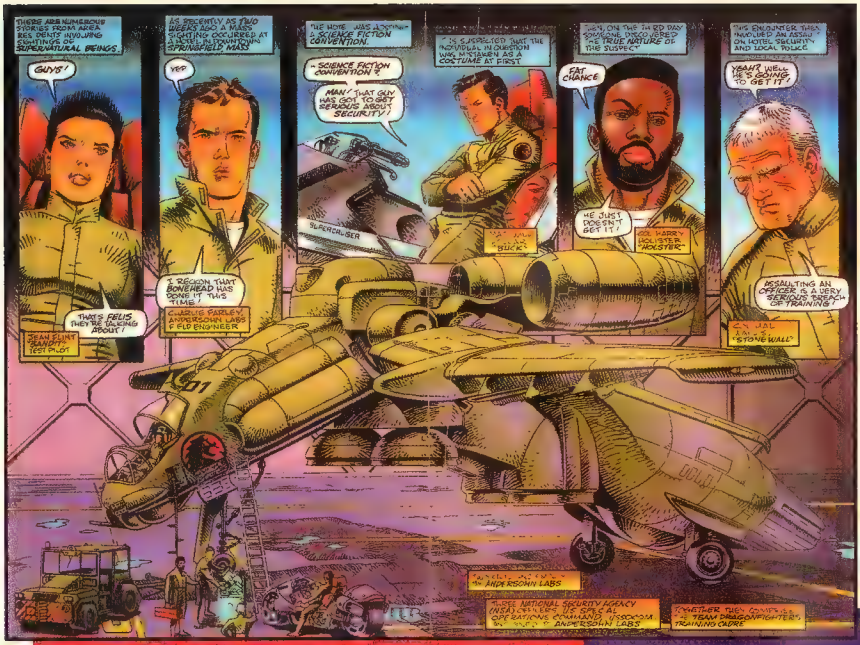
Art: Chris Bachalo/Mark Buckingham/Colors: Dennis Calero

Design & Layout: Jim McLennon

"Chris is without a doubt one of the most talented and creative artists in the business," raves Lobdell.

"That's the appeal of mutants," Lobdell says, "that we share their feelings of being outside, apart and needing understanding and acceptance."

"I think all that our comic books say is, to be a mutant, you're different from anyone else. It isn't easy; it comes at a cost," Scott Lobdell says. "Each one of us likes to feel—and we all are—different from everyone else, but at the same time, we're similar. We can look at the X-Men and see they're outsiders, but *we* know and care for them. And that's the appeal of mutants—that we share their feelings of being outside, apart, and needing understanding and acceptance. Because those are things we *all* look for and need in life." CS


THERE ARE NUMEROUS STORIES FROM AREA 88'S DENTS INVOLVING SIGHTINGS OF SUPERNATURAL BEINGS.
GUYS!
AS RECENTLY AS TWO WEEKS AGO A NEWS SIGHTING OCCURRED AT A BOWLING ALLEY IN DOWNTOWN SPRINGFIELD, MASS.
YEP.
A REGION THAT BONEHEAD HAS DONE IT THIS TIME.
CHARLIE FARLEY ANDERSONN LABS E.F.D. ENGINEER
THAT'S FELIS THEY'RE TALKING ABOUT!
JEAN FLINT SAMPSON TEST PILOT
THE MORE WAS ASSUMED A SCIENCE FICTION CONVENTION.
- SCIENCE FACTION CONVENTION ?
MAN! THAT GUY HAS GOT TO GET SERIOUS ABOUT SECURITY!
IT IS SURMISED THAT THE INDIVIDUAL IN QUESTION WAS NOT AWARE AS A COSTUME AT FIRST.
SUPERCHARGER
"BUCK" JONES
HE JUST DOESN'T GET IT!
DR. HARRY HOLISTER "MONSTER"
EAT CHANCE
WHAT WILL HE DO NEXT?
THIS ENCOUNTER THEN INVOLVED AN ASSAULT ON HOTEL SECURITY AND LOCAL POLICE.
ASSAULTING AN OFFICER IS A VERY SERIOUS BREACH OF TRAINING!
C.O. JAIL LT. "STONE WALL"
AT ANDERSONN LABS
THOSE NATIONAL SECURITY AGENCY (NSA) OFFICERS ARE SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND, WISCONSIN DIVISION OF ANDERSONN LABS
TOGETHER THEY COMPRISE TEAM DRAGONFIGHTER, TRAINING CADRE

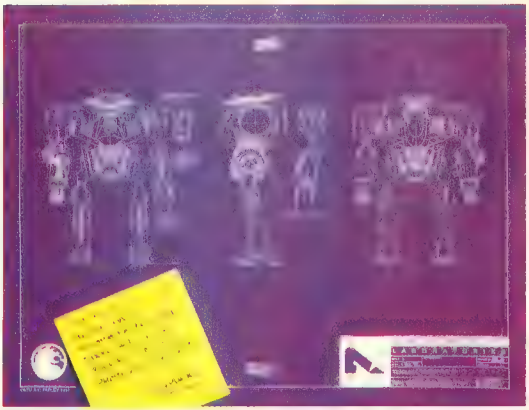
All Bioneers Art: A.C. Farley

Design & Layout: Maggie Hollands

BIONEERS!

Genetic advances help produce a whole new team of heroic mutants.

By MICHAEL BERRY



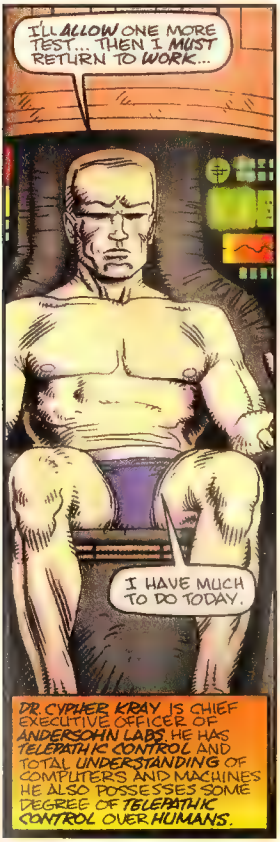
Bioneers brews familiar genre elements like hi-tech vehicles and armor, robots, animal/human hybrids and mutants into a heady adventure stew.

Control freak" might be too harsh a description of *Bioneers* creator A.C. Farley, but the co-founder of Mirage Publishing's Next imprint definitely wants to maintain the artistic integrity of his new superhero book.

Handling the scripting, pencilling, inking, lettering and coloring chores on the new bi-monthly, Farley has finally brought to fruition a scenario that captured his imagination more than a quarter-century ago. Featuring a cadre of scientists, mutants, robots, military personnel and human/animal hybrids,

Bioneers mixes fantasy with hard science fiction to produce a hi-tech adventure rooted in the manipulation of genetics and artificial intelligence.

The first issue introduces the diverse members of Team Dragonfighter, a group trained and equipped to counteract terrorism and espionage. Led by Dr. Cypher Kray, a mutant with telepathic control over computers, machinery and human beings, the team includes scientist Janus Kowalski and her creations, lion-man Garth Felis, amphibian-woman Carmilla O'Reilly and four highly intelligent Protozoid robots nicknamed Fe (Fearless), Fi (Firebrand), Fo (Forward Alert Recon) and Fum (Fumigator).


I'LL ALLOW ONE MORE TEST... THEN I MUST RETURN TO WORK...
I HAVE MUCH TO DO TODAY.
DR. CYPHER KRAY IS CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER OF ANDERSOHN LABS. HE HAS TELEPATHIC CONTROL AND TOTAL UNDERSTANDING OF COMPUTERS AND MACHINES. HE ALSO POSSESSES SOME DEGREE OF TELEPATHIC CONTROL OVER HUMANS.

"For all his intelligence, he can't help himself, he's going nuts," says Farley of Doctor Cypher Kray, who is stricken with the dread dementia dominus disease.

Bursting out of the mind of one-man creative juggernaut A.C. Farley is Team Dragonfire, the counterterrorist strike force at the center of *Bioneers*.

Other members include Kowalski's daughter Rachel, test pilot Jean "Bandit" Flint, field engineer Charlie Farley, Major Will "Buck" Dollar, Colonel Harry "Holster" Hollister and Colonel Hal "Stonewall" Wallis.

Bioneers has its origin in concepts Farley devised at age 13. He says, "That was about the time Ralph Bakshi's *Wizards* came out, and that was the first time I had seen anybody attempt to blend sword & sorcery and science fiction."

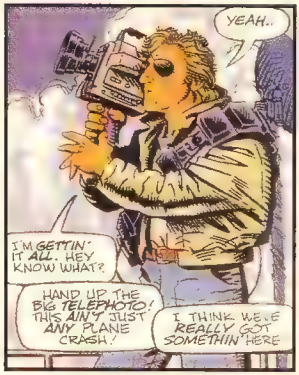
Farley also found inspiration in the Tarzan novels of Edgar Rice Burroughs and patterned his character, Garth Felis, after the Jungle Lord's pet lion, Jadbal-ja. He says, "Originally, Garth was this black-maned lion-man who carried a sword—and was pretty goofy."

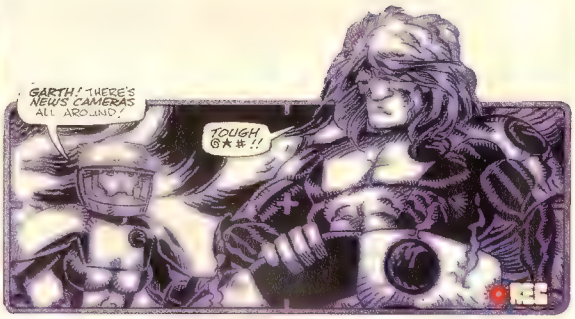
The lion-man idea was put on the back burner while Farley began his professional art career, first as a cover illustrator for SF and fantasy books. "I was always afraid to send people samples," says Farley. "I never felt like I was ready. If I hadn't started taking art to SF conventions, I never would have gotten work."

Betsy Mitchell, then an editor at Baen Books, spotted Farley's work at a convention and asked him if he would like to do some cover art for Baen. That led to further assignments for Tor Books, Easton Press, *Asimov's SF Magazine*, *Analog* and the Doubleday Science Fiction Book Club, as well as for the TSR and GDW role-playing game companies.

Farley also owned and operated a comics store for three years, and it was there that he met Peter Laird, co-creator of *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*. Farley remembers one of their early encounters: "We had talked in the past, just as acquaintances, but then he asked me if I would like to do a Turtle book. I said, 'Sure, yeah.' But nothing else happened after that. I was used to working with paperback book companies, and usually I get a contract in the mail, something to confirm the assignment. Peter showed up about a month later and asked if I had done anything on the Turtles project. Well, I hadn't, but I got serious after that."

In 1990, Farley created the cover for *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Collected Book One*. He went on to act as the regular cover artist for all subsequent Collected Books, as well as the 13-issue "City at War" series. He also


YEAH..
I'M GETTIN' IT ALL. HEY KNOW WHAT?
HAND UP THE BIG TELEPHOTO! THIS AIN'T JUST ANY PLANE CRASH!
I THINK WE'VE REALLY GOT SOMETHIN HERE



It is Garth Felis who blows the team's cover. "Originally, Garth was this black-maned lion-man who carried a sword—and was pretty goofy."

Art: Michael Dooney/Colors: A.C. Farley

produced a pair of issues for the black-and-white Turtle series, #29 and #43, and contributed short stories to *Turtle Soup* and *Plastron Cafe*.

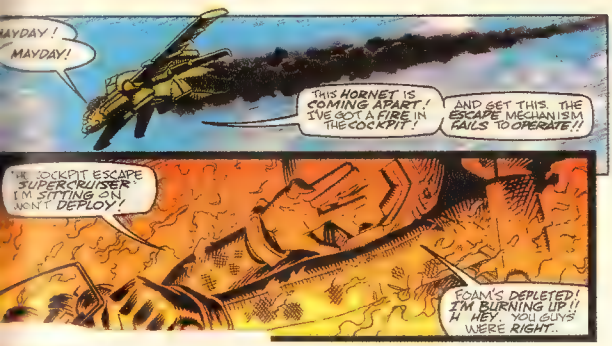
Last year, Farley, Laird and Michael Dooney started the Next imprint, envisioning it as a creator-owned banner under which they could explore superhero-oriented themes. Farley says, "Mirage had this publishing machine all set up, and we thought, 'We should be doing more here.' Originally, we wanted to create a Mirage Universe and have all the characters be able to be-bop in and out of each other's titles. But because the Turtles have so many contractual limitations due to agreements with other people, we couldn't really do that.

"We ended up making a whole other imprint, which we don't mean to be separate from Mirage. It's just a way to distinguish the new titles from the Turtles."

It was in the pages of *Plastron Cafe* that readers got their first preview of *Bioneers*. Farley contributed a story in which lion-man Garth went AWOL from Andersohn Labs in Amherst, Massachusetts, and attended a science fiction convention. There he met a girl who believed that he was playing Vincent from *Beauty & the Beast*, before figuring out that he *was* exactly what he appeared to be.

Bioneers #1 finds Garth back at headquarters but now the subject of intense media scrutiny. To make matters even worse, Bandit crashes her experimental plane and must be rescued out in the open by Team Dragonfighter. Before the issue's end, the group's veil of secrecy is in tatters.

Farley first got the idea for amphibian-woman Carmilla O'Reilly and the Bioneers when he was 13, and they've been on his mind ever since.


MAYDAY!
MAYDAY!
THIS HORNET IS COMING APART! I'VE GOT A FIRE IN THE COCKPIT!
AND GET THIS. THE ESCAPE MECHANISM FAILS TO OPERATE!!
THE COCKPIT ESCAPE SUPERCRUISER I'M SITTING ON WON'T DEPLOY!
FOAM'S DEPLETED! I'M BURNING UP!! HEY, YOU GUYS WERE RIGHT..

"I don't want to do artwork by committee. I want to handle the whole process," says Farley of his unusual (for the mainstream) auteur status.

Subsequent issues will explore the team members' reactions to their leader's battle with dementia dominus, an insidious, degenerative disease afflicting superhumans. Cypher Kray—a father-figure to Garth—Carmilla and even the robots suffer from this birth defect. "Sometimes the disease develops slowly, but it progresses quickly in Kray," Farley says. "For all his intelligence, he can't help himself. He's going nuts."

Kray's delusions cause him to attempt to control the entire world's cybernetic network. Neither he nor Team Dragonfighter realize the magnitude of his folly until a series of disasters occur. Train wrecks, airplane crashes and other computer-related calamities keep the Bioneers on edge during issue #2.

In addition to coping with the consequences of Kray's deteriorating sanity, the Bioneers must also contend with the return of the Recombatants, the malevolent brainchildren of scientist Edward Bushkill. Products of a super-secret program thought to have been terminated years ago, the Recombatants are life forms too dangerous and violent even to be used as disposable super-soldiers.

Bioneers is only one of three new Next titles. Laird's *Stupid Heroes* and Dooney's *Xenotech* will expand the imprint's repertoire of superheroics. Although the books contain cross-references to each other and their individual four-part storylines will all culminate in a crossover title tentatively entitled *Maelstrom*, the three series can be read and enjoyed separately. After *Maelstrom*, *Bioneers* will go on hiatus until August '95, when it will resume with a new story arc.

According to Farley, *Xenotech* (previewed in CS #38) focuses on an ancient race of aliens who have been using dimensional teleportation to travel around the universe. He says, "What's happened is that they've opened rifts they can't close, and every once in a while, a portal will open and something alien will come through and wreak havoc."

Because the peripatetic aliens often visit our planet, Earth is especially susceptible to erupting dimensional rifts. The aliens hand-pick and then technologically augment teams of humans to stand guard against extradimensional incursions.

Stupid Heroes focuses on dementia dominus, the same disease that causes Kray so much grief. Superheroes born after 1964 are vulnerable to a genetic defect that may cause them to become more child-like, less intelligent or even completely evil.

Farley says, "*Stupid Heroes* sounds kind of silly, and we tried to talk Peter into using another name. But he really likes it. Peter says, '*Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* sounded silly at first, too.' Well, you can't argue with that."

As for his own project, Farley is perfectly happy to do it all himself. "I don't have a problem with people who do it," he explains, "but I don't want to do artwork by committee. I want to handle the whole process. Naturally, it takes four times as long for me to get anything done, but I hope the finished product is better for it."

Farley says working on his own allows him the freedom to develop the characters any way he chooses. "You would think that, after having the idea since I was 13, I would have a more concrete idea about the characters. But it was really hard to nail them down. When I started, I felt that once I did something with them, that that's the way they had to stay. Now I don't think that's necessarily true."

What will distinguish *Bioneers* from the myriad superhero team titles already jostling for newsrack space? Farley replies, "There's nothing really new, but it all depends on the way the material is filtered through the artist. I'm having a lot of fun with *Bioneers*, and I hope that translates through to the reader.

"Most of all I want it to make sense, to have internal consistency at all times. I want people to be able to read it and never say, 'They would never do that!' I think that quality is missing in many comics."

Farley is also developing a CD-ROM game based on *Bioneers*. "I'm trying to get the plot for that together, as well as the plot for the next story arc. I've made up my mind not to incorporate the CD plot into the book, but leave them completely separate."

While enjoying his creative independence, A.C. Farley also understands the downside to total auteurship. He says, "If this thing doesn't fly and nobody likes it, I can't say, 'Well, somebody else made me do it.' If anybody has any problems with anything in *Bioneers*, there's only one person to blame. And that would be me." CS

Explaining Mirage's Next imprint Farley reveals, "It's just a way to distinguish the new titles from the Turtles."

RANGER ALONE

By KIM HOWARD JOHNSON

It's splitsville for the Lone Ranger & Tonto. Who'll get custody of the silver bullets?

It's the Lone Ranger—with an attitude!" exclaims artist Timothy Truman.

Scripter Joe R. Lansdale, noted for such genre works as *The Drive-In* and *Dead in the West*, and Truman, known in comics for his work on *Grimjack*, *Scout* and *Hawkworld*, are reuniting for another comics series following their acclaimed *Jonah Hex: Two-Gun Mojo*, published by Vertigo. After their version of that grim, nasty Western hero, the pair are aiming their six-guns at an even bigger star of the Old West.

The Lone Ranger has always been a heroic ideal for radio, TV and comics fans—a wholesome, mainstream, almost whitebread character.

Guided by Lansdale and Truman, however, the four-part *Lone Ranger and Tonto* mini-series from Topps will blend the Old West with '90s sensibilities and a dash of the supernatural that made *Jonah Hex* a success.

"The Lone Ranger and Tonto, during a moment of crisis, meet a nasty creature from Hell," says Lansdale of the plot. "And things go bad from there. The series is as much humor as anything else—it's satire, and there's some political stuff as well."

It all came about when Topps Comics, which owned the *Ranger* comic book rights, approached Truman. Topps had been calling him for the past two years, trying to get him to do a *Lone Ranger* series, but the artist was simply too busy. "Finally, I got a hole in my schedule, and I could work it in," he says.

"Topps originally contacted me because I have an interest in an unpatronizing portrayal of Native Americans," explains Truman. "With the Lone Ranger comes Tonto, so Topps contacted me in order to put a new spin on Tonto that would make him seem less subservient to the Lone Ranger. I had just gotten done working with Joe on *Jonah Hex*, and enjoyed the experience so much that I gave him a call to see if he would be interested in writing it, because I thought it needed a more humorous angle."

Readers may be shocked to hear that the Lone Ranger and Tonto are splitting up in this mini-series, but Lansdale says that idea was actually suggested by Topps. "Topps said, 'We want to break the Lone Ranger and Tonto up—you boys figure out how to do it,' " Lansdale recalls. "Tim and I had some discussions. I didn't want it to be overly simplistic, I wanted it to have some echo throughout the comic. It's really a series of events that culminate in the breakup, although we actually see it in the first panel of the first issue, when Tonto gives the Lone Ranger a right cross!

"This is less of a gimmick than killing Superman, because this is still true to what the Lone Ranger has *always* been. This is the very first Lone Ranger *anywhere* who really has a human side. The Lone Ranger and Tonto are characters, not caricatures. We see what makes them tick a little better, we understand who they are and our interpretation of the characters is as valid as any that has ever been done."

"It's kind of the completion of the old joke where the Lone Ranger and Tonto are surrounded by Indians," says Truman. "The punchline is, 'What do you mean "we," white man?' Everybody has wanted to see this."

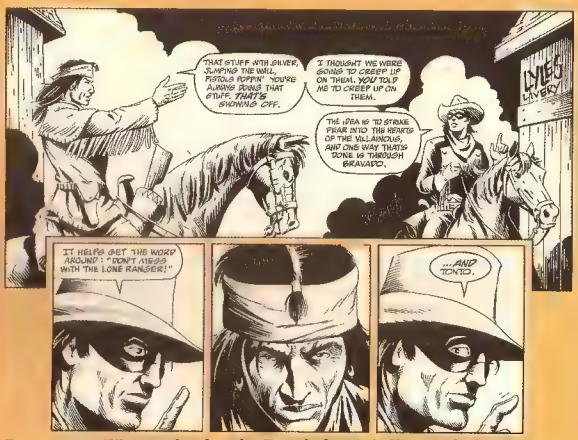
Lansdale and Truman admit they may seem like a strange choice for such wholesome characters, but they're being very true to the tradition. "The strange thing about the Lone Ranger, speaking of whitebread characters, is that Tim and I are both Boy Scouts at heart," says Lansdale.

"The Lone Ranger and Tonto, during a moment of crisis, meet a nasty creature from Hell," says Lansdale. "And things go bad from there."

It's inconceivable that my strangest adventure and experiences in my career would result in the product of a long-standing friendship.
SMACK!
PAY BY THE DAY - GILL & HEATH PHOTOGRAPHERS
For all I've spoiled Tonto's friendship, he's wisdom, I see now

Inconceivable! Artist Tim Truman and writer Joe Lansdale explore what happens when you play second banana to the Lone Ranger for all those years.

"We both really believe in honor and the so-called Code of the West, which didn't truly exist but was given to us when we were growing up by characters like the Lone Ranger! So even though I may present a grittier view or a darker side, most of the time I show such a negative side to make you realize how necessary the positive side really is.


"THAT STUFF WITH SILVER JUMPING THE WALL, PISTOLS POPPIN' YOU'RE ALWAYS DOING THAT STUFF. THAT'S SHOWING OFF.
I THOUGHT WE WERE GOING TO CREEP UP ON THEM. YOU TOLD ME TO CREEP UP ON THEM.
THE IDEA IS TO STRIKE FEAR INTO THE HEARTS OF THE VILLAINOUS, AND ONE WAY THAT'S DONE IS THROUGH BRAVADO.
LYNCH LIVERY
IT HELPS GET THE WORD AROUND : " DON'T MESS WITH THE LONE RANGER!"
...AND TONTO.

Truman states, "We wanted to show that Tonto had a mind of his own. [He] is a hero, instead of a subservient lackey who goes into town to get the horses."

Especially when it was nothing
STAY AWAY FROM ME.
FOREVER... ...KEMO... SABE
I tried to think of some thing to say. Something that would make him understand. Nothing.

All Ranger Art: Trademark & Copyright 1994 Palladium Limited Partnership

"The Lone Ranger and Tonto are characters, not caricatures," Lansdale offers. "We see what makes them tick a little better."

"In the *Lone Ranger* comic, I kept that same viewpoint all the way through. Tim and I agreed that the Lone Ranger and Tonto were going to have the same values they've always had. Then, I thought that if we had those same values, we had to find the human flaw. The human flaw I found in the Lone Ranger was pride, and that made him more human to me. It still allowed us to keep the Ranger's virtues, but to give the series a more realistic turn."

"One of the interesting spins that Joe put on the story is the fact that the Lone Ranger is very much a legend in his own time, just like Billy the Kid and Wyatt Earp had dime novels written about them during their lives," adds Truman. "The Lone Ranger finds himself the subject of dime novels, and that starts going to his head. At the same time, we begin establishing that Tonto and the Lone Ranger as we know them are products of an alternate universe, where Tonto speaks in 'Ugh! Me ride 'em Scout' language. He talks like that in the dime novels. In real life, he's just like most Native Americans, even of that time, who learned very passable English."

Truman has taken the opportunity to highlight a heroic, dignified, capable Tonto, another of those heroes for the '90s. "We wanted to show that he had a mind of his own," says Truman. "We never thought of him as working for the Lone Ranger, but as being an equal partner. But due to these dime novels and it's early in their careers and they're establishing their own egos and jockeying for position, the Lone Ranger sometimes forgets their equality and inadvertently views Tonto as the Tonto of the dime novels.

"Tonto is a hero, instead of just a subservient lackey who goes into town to get the horses. I was a real fan of the *Tonto* comics during the '50s, and in those comics, Tonto's personality is quite different than it is in the *Lone Ranger* comics, particularly when he's talking to his own people."

"I just now realized that when I started writing the Lone Ranger and Tonto, I was also influenced by those *Tonto* comics, and I had forgotten them," Lansdale admits. "Now that you mention them, I realize that a lot of the viewpoint for the Tonto that I wrote was influenced very heavily by those!"

Truman points out that Jay Silverheels' portrayal of Tonto on screen in the '50s was very much a product of its time. "His role in life went far beyond

All Ranger Art: Tim Truman/Inks: Rick Magyar

"Westerns are American mythology," Truman notes. And the Lone Ranger and Tonto are among those at the top of the heap.

Tonto," Truman explains. "Jay Silverheels was very active in the Native American community, and actually helped teach one of the very first Native American acting workshops. Whenever he would appear at shopping centers in his Tonto gear, he wanted to prove to children of other cultures that Native American people were real—it wasn't just a dead culture resurrected by television."

"Jay Silverheels had so much presence that when you watch the shows, there's a certain power and pride that comes through in his performance," says Lansdale. "That was also incorporated in what I was doing. Even though I wanted to change many aspects of that time, there was always a certain nobility that Silverheels gave to that character."

"And certainly, I think Clayton Moore's view of the Lone Ranger was of nobility," adds Truman.

Both agree it would have been almost impossible to do a traditional 1950s Tonto in America today due to the character's stereotypical flavor.

"I *wouldn't* have done a traditional Tonto," Truman declares.

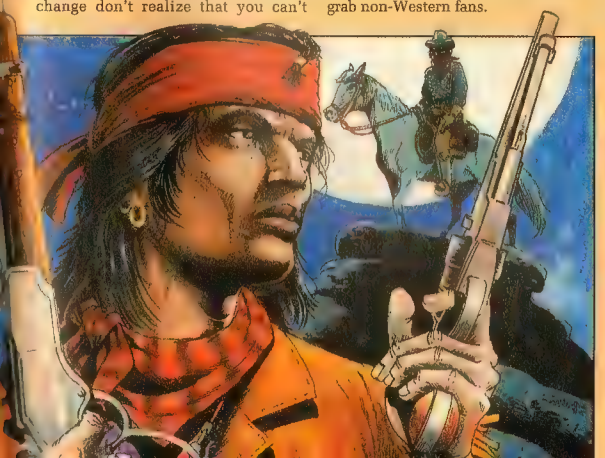
"Topps was always behind us in that," says Lansdale. "But the Lone Ranger people actually seemed to want the old, traditional Lone Ranger and Tonto. Topps stood behind us, and so it's going to come out *our* way. They felt, commercially, they couldn't *sell* the old Lone Ranger. They could sell the concept of the Lone Ranger and what he was about, but they couldn't sell what I call 'saving the ranch' anymore. I really believe our Lone Ranger *is* traditional, but there were many people who wanted us to do it exactly as it was done before, with the same situations, riding up behind that same damned rock in every episode. People who don't want to grow up or change don't realize that you can't have these old images all of the time—it doesn't mean that they aren't wonderful or nostalgic, it just means that you don't keep adding to them. In their time, they were original and created by people who were doing original work, and if you're not going to bring something of yourself to the work, what's the point in doing it?"

The team believes that they are *not* revamping Tonto and the Lone Ranger, but focusing on existing character traits to make them realistic. "That's where many of the traditionalists are very wrong," says Lansdale. "We haven't gotten away from who these people are—we've just made them realistic. Nobody's perfect all the time, nobody's in good humor or feels noble all the time. But, there are certain characteristics that *identify* the Lone Ranger and Tonto—nobility, courage, a desire to do what is positive for other people—and I don't think we lost them at all."

"We have a good, literate story," says Truman. "Joe uses the flaws to amplify their dignity. If the characters are walking around in this superhuman, super-dignified can-do-no-wrong fashion, especially these days, they become unrealistic. You can use flaws to point out the characters' strengths."

"That's exactly right," Lansdale agrees. "Tim's art does that alone. Just the way he draws faces and expressions shows me a lot of internalization about what these people think and who they are. He should give himself credit for this ability, which I'm not even sure he knows he has!"

The Lansdale-Truman *Lone Ranger and Tonto* mini-series features not only traditional Wild West action, outlaws and Indians, but even includes some undead creatures prowling the frontier. It's a conscious attempt to grab non-Western fans.



"I wanted to do this because I had so much love for the Lone Ranger, but I loved the concept more than the actual stories," explains Lansdale. "I loved the stories when I was a kid, but going back to look at them, I thought, 'I love these characters, I love what they stand for, but I don't want to see them save the ranch *again*!' I don't want to see another crooked town again—there were basically six plots, and they would do them over and over! I watched all the TV episodes that I could, and rented Lone Ranger cartoons; I dug up comic books and read books. When I tried to put the plot together, I was so aware of the Lone Ranger and who he was that when I sent my first plot to Tim, he said I wasn't letting loose. And he was right! He said they didn't come to us to do the *old* Lone Ranger, they came to us to do what *we* wanted to do.

"We started talking about wind wagons and hot air balloons, taking things that *did* exist in the Old West and extrapolating them to a higher degree than they were ever developed. One just fed the other, and I finally put a plot together that brought in science-fiction elements, fantasy elements, horror elements, and I took everything Tim suggested and tried to mix it together into a heady stew. There's a lot of material in these four comics!"

Both Lansdale and Truman agree that the supernatural elements here may remind readers of their first collaboration, the award-winning *Jonah Hex: Two-Gun Mojo* mini-series (now collected as a trade paperback). "I won a Bram Stoker Award for the writing, but I feel like Tim deserves half of that, because without his art and his portrayal of the characters, they probably wouldn't have noticed my writing!" says Lansdale.

For Truman, the *Lone Ranger* artwork posed a personal challenge, though he took to the story's fantastic elements quickly. "My biggest fear was not being able to draw handsome people, because I haven't done it that often," laughs Truman. "It's hard for me to draw the Lone Ranger without chin stubble, because most of my characters have that! It's not that Joe and I can't do anything but fantasy and horror, because Joe has certainly written Westerns without it, and he's a very noted writer of mysteries with no supernatural elements at all. And I've done straight history books. So, we're not one-note guys, it's just that this is the story that got our blood boiling."

"There's something about the Lone Ranger, Sherlock Holmes, Tarzan and a few other characters that lend themselves to fantastic stories," says Lans-

"Topps said, 'We want to break the Lone Ranger and Tonto up—you boys figure out how to do it,' " recalls Lansdale.

dale. "One of the influences for me was actually a cartoon show that everybody says was awful, but had the Lone Ranger dealing with swamp creatures and other classic monsters—that influenced me a little."

"Also, this guy is riding around the old West with a mask on," Truman notes. "In real life, in the first town he rode into, somebody would have shot him between the eyes! So, there's a fantasy element here in the character anyway, and anybody who put us down for putting a fantasy element in the book has to realize that the Lone Ranger was borrowing very heavily from superheroes by the fact that his creators put a mask on him in the first place to cater to that market!"

In light of their second joint comics project, the pair say their collaboration is relatively easy. "Tim and I usually just start talking about stuff," Lansdale explains. "I'll ask Tim what he likes, and he'll send me Xeroxed pictures to get me excited about the kind of stuff he might want to draw. I let it all mix in the soup and develop an attitude about it. We'll talk on the phone a few times, not even about the plot specifically. This whole *Lone Ranger* thing happened when we somehow started talking about wind wagons and things that were in the West that people don't think about. From there, it snowballed. I write the scripts and send them to Tim. In a sense, I'm done with them, but it's still a living collaboration, because if Tim tells me that there's something that needs to be changed, we make the change!"

"The neat thing about working with Joe is that he's so open to collaboration," says Truman. "The closest thing I've ever had to that was working with John Ostrander on *Grimjack*, which was just a total collaborative effort. It's real weird for me to work from a full script so enthusiastically, because I'm a writer too—and a very snooty one!"

Neither hesitated to suggest changes to the other through the course of *The Lone Ranger*. "There were things I did that he told me just didn't work!" remarks Lansdale. "There were times I was inclined to have Tonto pistol-whip somebody, and Tim said, 'Now Tonto's *not* going to do that! *That's* not Tonto. If this guy doesn't do right, then the *next* time he'll pistol-whip him!' "

When he was growing up, Truman was a faithful follower of TV's Western heroes. "There was *Johnny Yuma* and *Lone Ranger, Wanted: Dead or Alive* and Paladin [of *Have Gun, Will Travel*]. I would sit down and, on the back of my sister's homework, draw pictures of whatever was on TV and take the story off in different directions. All those Westerns from that time fed my brain as much as comics did."

"I wanted to do this because I had so much love for the Lone Ranger," says Lansdale.

Design & Layout: Jim McLarnan

"As a child, the first things that affected me were Superman and the Lone Ranger, because they had that code of honor," says Lansdale. "That really had a big impact on me, because my father had that same code. That affected me tremendously, and that's where I worked from. I also used to watch reruns of Gene Autry and Roy Rogers. I always thought they were sissy cowboys, but they had more effect on me than I realized."

Lansdale and Truman are doing a followup, tentatively titled *Jonah Hex: Riders of the Worm and Such*, which involves singing cowboys. It was partially inspired by the Autry serial *The Hidden Empire*, which features singing cowboys who discover a hidden kingdom under their Radio Ranch.

The two are also keeping busy with solo projects. Lansdale's major new novel *Mucho Mojo* is now out from Mysterious Press, as is a short story collection called *Writer of the Purple Rage*. Lansdale is also looking forward to three new episodes of *Batman: The Animated Series* that he has written, including one which guest-stars Jonah Hex (as voiced by Lance Henriksen). And Truman is doing comics and tour T-shirts for the Grateful Dead's merchandising catalog, and is collaborating again with Carlos Santana (following the Rock-It Comics biography). Truman and Grateful Dead lyricist Robert Hunter also plan to do a Vertigo one-shot horror story based on a Hunter poem.

In the meantime, the pair are having a terrific time with *The Lone Ranger*. "When I'm writing and Tim's drawing, the only people we have to please are each other," says Lansdale. "It's not that we don't want to please others—we just don't have a *clue* what everybody else wants!"

With *Jonah Hex* and *The Lone Ranger*, the team almost seems to be spearheading a movement to revive the comic-book Western. "It has been fun to spend the last year doing Westerns when everybody said I would never be able to do it," says Truman. "It goes beyond Hollywood doing all these Westerns now. What people want is a good story."

Joe Lansdale and Timothy Truman feel it's important for *The Lone Ranger*—and the Western—to succeed in comics form once again.

"Westerns are American mythology," the artist says. "It's the closest thing we have to the Greek gods. That's our mythology. It's our national culture!"

Blankman Who?

Damon Wayans gets to act heroic while in really long underwear.

By KIM HOWARD JOHNSON

Photo: Jean Kreitler

Ever watchful. Ever vigilant. Ever funny-lookin'. Damon Wayans is on the beat, so watch out for Blankman.

The world's newest superhero doesn't have super-powers. He doesn't have money. He doesn't even have a name!

In fact, *Blankman* may be the first superhero to battle crime in long underwear—*i.e.*, actual long underwear.

Damon (*In Living Color*) Wayans stars as eccentric inventor Darryl Walker, who builds himself an arsenal of low-budget crimefighting gizmos to use as the ever-vigilant Blankman. Accompanied by his older brother and reluctant sidekick Kevin (David Alan Grier, also of *In Living Color*), he sets out to take on the mob that overruns Metro, Illinois.

Wayans, who's also the film's co-scripter and executive producer, says fans of recent superhero flicks will find the unexpected in this new adventure/comedy. "This is really Everyman—what if Joe Schmoe down the block decided he was going to take on the criminal world by himself? It's the reality of what would happen if Mr. Schmoe took on John Gotti."

The roots of *Blankman* are actually in TV more than comic books or film, he reveals. "I grew up on the *Batman* TV show," says Wayans. "I loved its campiness, how corny yet committed these guys were. I especially liked Robin. Robin had all the passion, whereas Batman was the Guy. In *Blankman*, I'm actually Robin. This is how things would be if Robin had his day, how he would run things. When I went to see the movie *Batman*, I was so disappointed! I didn't know it was the Dark Knight. I was thinking, 'Where are the jokes? This isn't funny.' His gadgets were great, and his car was incredible. I sat there thinking, 'What if Batman wasn't millionaire Bruce Wayne, what if he was welfare recipient Bruce Wayne? What could he do?' And as a result, I came up with Blankman."

A flashback scene in which the two brothers are watching superheroes on TV is actually based on real life.

Photo: Nicola Goode

"That's the only autobiographical thing in the film," Wayans notes. "Keenan [Ivory Wayans, *Living Color*'s creator] and I used to sit and watch *Batman* and *Green Hornet*, really pretending that we were Batman for several hours afterward. It was silly, but it was fun, with the music and the colors—it just captured our hearts, all the silliness with the Riddler, Egghead, the Bookworm. There were so many different villains, but no one was killing each other—it was just *fun*."

The film's director, Mike (*Indian Summer*) Binder, is a very big comic book fan. "I collected 'em, I went to the conventions, and I still have several boxes of comic books," explains

"I grew up on the *Batman* TV show," says *Blankman* star, co-writer and executive producer Wayans. "This is how things would be if Robin had his day."

Photo: Nicola Goode

Streaking to the scene of the crime on his trusty Blankwheel, Blankman and his not-so-loyal sidekick, the Other Guy (David Alan Grier), prepare for action.

Binder. "I know that world really well. On the wall of my living room, I have two giant pieces by Bob Kane—that's how into comics I am. I had always wanted to do a comic *Batman* film, so when Damon told me about *Blankman*, I jumped up and down. To me, this movie is *Batman* without any money!"

There are moments in the film that will be best appreciated by comics fans. "We play with many of the standard comic-book scenes and conventions, and either use them straight or give them a slight tweak," says Binder. "There's always a moment when the superhero goes over to the window and says, 'Fine. Tell him to meet me there.' There are little moments like that—they'll play on one level, but if you really know comic books, it'll play as a spoof on that."

Superhero parodies have not always been successful, ranging from TV's *Captain Nice* to *The Meteor Man*. Many superheroic characters almost seem like parodies in themselves, but Wayans maintains they aren't doing a satire with *Blankman*.

"This is a self-contained story—there are some parodies within it, but this is not a total parody of *Batman*," Wayans says. "*Blankman* works as a story."

Wayans developed the script by writing individual gags, then linking them together. "Because I write jokes, and because I was on *Living Color*, I'm used to pumping out seven or eight sketches in a week," he says. "It was pretty easy to write, because I just wrote jokes. The script that Columbia Pictures bought was a very, very funny script, but then we had to come in and put some story into it. We had to put people on an emotional rollercoaster ride, as well as a comedic rollercoaster ride."

The director agrees that the story can play on its own, without the laughs. "There's a legend, a story and an origin," Binder observes. "We just tweaked it to put the comedy in. Of course, 90 percent of the movie relies on the fact that Damon Wayans is a comic genius! He has created a character that's unique, just like Paul Reubens did with Pee-wee Herman."

Binder tried to include two different stylistic approaches in the film, starting out in the real world, then becoming bigger than life.

"This was a cross between the *Batman* TV series and a more realistic tone," says Binder. "It starts out in the real world and progresses to bright colors and campy angles. When it begins, nobody buys into this world but Darryl. The movie's like *Through the Looking Glass*. When his life goes bad, it's like he looks into a *Batman* TV

"She was one of the sweetest women I've ever met," exclaims Wayans of Robin Givens, who plays Kimberly Jonz, reporter and Blank-love interest.

Photo: Nicola Goode

"I get put in my own Death Trap," raves Wayans of this Lotto ball-filled aquarium. "We're locked in this tank of water which is going to drown us."

Photo: Nicola Goode

show and goes through the screen and becomes Blankman. No one believes him at first, but eventually, everyone buys into this world—even the villain becomes a TV villain. We really concentrated on colors, but the real transitions were the gadgets, the Blankwheel and the Blankstation, which he turns into his Fortress of Solitude. He picks up Robin Givens' character on the Blankwheel, a motorcycle and a VW chassis which have been turned into a car that drives on the rails. He takes her on a long ride, going into a tunnel and ending in the Blankstation. When the audience takes that ride, from there on in, it's bigger than life."

"The film has to get your attention," Wayans emphasizes. "What's interesting about what Mike Binder did is that it slowly becomes a cartoon world, the *Batman* world. The movie starts off real, and turns into Gotham City."

Wayans' character also converts various household items into crimefighting weapons. "I have an orthopedic shoe that's a boomerang—it's on a rubber band," he says. "I have rocket skates made from roller blades and jet packs. I have the Speculum of Life, which is a gynecological device that I use like the Jaws of Life to pry doors open."

"David Alan Grier is like a brother," Wayans notes. "David is just perfect, and the chemistry is incredible."

Photo: Nicola Goode

Design & Layout: Maggie Hollands

All Blankman Photos Copyright 1994 Columbia Pictures Industries, Inc.

Photo: Nicola Goode

"This was a cross between the *Batman* TV series and a more realistic tone," states director Mike Binder.

Blankman sports one of the *least* impressive superhero costumes in recent memory. "It's actually a pajama suit, like the kind Redd Foxx used to wear in *Sanford and Son*," Wayans says. "I have a belt, like a tool belt, with all of my gadgets on it. And I have dishwashing gloves and a sock around my eyes. This is the first movie I ever made where I *didn't* want to keep any of my wardrobe!"

Photo: Nicola Goode

The battle against crime is over...for today. Blankman and the Other Guy can be Darryl Walker and his brother Kevin—until villainy rears its ugly head.

In the film's climax, Wayans gets the wish he may have made while watching Batman and Robin face cliff-hanger death "same Bat-time, same Bat-channel" at least once weekly.

"I get put in my own Death Trap!" Wayans exclaims. "We're locked in this tank of water which is going to drown us. So, I had to be in a tank with this costume on—I did 12 weeks of filming with this hot costume, and then I had to get in water—it was pretty challenging!"

After working with Grier on *In Living Color*, Wayans says it was easy to revive that chemistry for their scenes in *Blankman*. "David is like a brother," he says. "He's a lot of fun. Originally, Keenan was supposed to do the role, but he had his own movie [*Low Down Dirty Shame*] to do. Everything happens for a reason. David is just perfect, and the chemistry is incredible. That's what everyone says when they walk out of the movie—they really like these two guys."

Givens plays Kimberly Jonz, the television reporter who catapults Blankman to fame. "It's funny—she carries so much baggage with her that I was expecting a totally different person," says Wayans. "She was one of the sweetest women I've ever met! She was a trouper. She got hurt a couple of times. Mike was driving her around the lot on a golf cart, and made a really wide, sharp turn. She went flying, but she didn't complain at all—she just got up, laughed it off and got back on the golf cart.

"Then, I have the Blankwheel, which rides on the train tracks. We were in Chicago, on the elevated train, and she had to jump on the back of it. Robin got off after a take, and she fell in one of the holes that leads to the street below! We almost lost our co-star, but she didn't complain. We just kept shooting!"

If *Blankman* is a success, Damon Wayans has ideas for a follow-up. "I would definitely do a sequel," he says. "It would either see me fight my evil twin, or we would bring in a new villain."

"If you liked the *Batman* TV series or if you liked the *Batman* movies, you'll like this movie," says Mike Binder. "Just combine the two, throw in a dash of *Pee-wee's Big Adventure* and *Blazing Saddles*, and you've got *Blankman*!" CS

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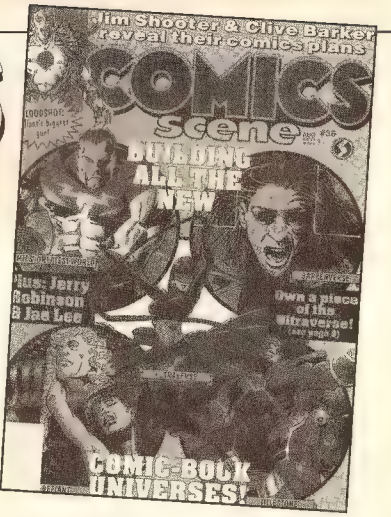
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NINJA HIGH SCHOOL DAYS

Ben Dunn brings "Ninja High School" back home.

By HARLEY JEBENS

Ben Dunn has plenty of reasons to celebrate. Antarctic Press, the company Dunn started in 1985, has grown in a year from its quarters in a small room in the back of Dunn's house to a 2000-square-foot office building in north San Antonio. From a company that published one fanzine—*Mangazine*, a periodical that covers Japanese animation (*anime*) and showcases the work of amateur Japanese comics artists, a periodical that the company continues to publish—Antarctic Press now issues 12 to 13 titles a month, with sales of from 3,500 to 10,000 copies per title.

They've branched out from being a publisher of solely Japanese-style comics to the point where they now produce anthropomorphic titles and reprints of Japanese material. The company's latest venture into the sphere of adult comics has, in its first six months, become one of their most successful. They emerged from the superhero crash following 1993's death of Superman virtually unscathed. Antarctic Press recently published their 200th book, proudly noting that their efforts represent .5 percent of the comic book industry. They're a small company, but a growing one.

And, as if to serve as a capper for all this other activity, *Ninja High School*—a comic that spins tales of lusty, zesty female ninjas and zesty, lusty alien princesses and the teens they zestfully lust after, the book that Dunn writes and draws, the book that would have been Antarctic Press' flagship title—can now, officially, assume that position. After 36 issues with Eternity Comics, Dunn has brought *Ninja High School* home.

Dunn was contacted by Malibu and Eternity Comics in the mid-1980s, when they were publishing such *anime*-related titles as *Robotech* and *Captain Harlock*. Dunn, first exposed to Japanese comics during a 1976 visit to Taiwan, was drawing in that style and was tapped by Eternity to pencil *Captain Harlock*. The artist then brought his own creation, *Ninja High School*, to the company.

Only Ben Dunn can give larger-than-life rodents a gritty edge, and from now on, he'll only do it for Antarctic Press—in *Ninja High School*.

His partnership with Eternity, which lasted seven years, he says, "was a good, pleasant experience. I didn't have any real problems with them. In the beginning, they pretty much let me do whatever I wanted, and they supported whatever I decided to do. But as the company grew larger, they became more infatuated with other properties, and didn't pay attention to the series as I would have liked to have seen them pay attention to it. I understandably knew the reasoning behind [this lack of attention]. I mean, they are a company and they have a certain focus. So after seven years with them, I decided the series would be best served if I took it back. There's no ill will."

Even while *Ninja High School* was being published by Eternity, the title still had a strong connection with Dunn's company. Antarctic Press put out numerous *Ninja High School* spin-offs; *Hitomi and Her Girl Commandos*, *Zetraman*, *Ninja High School Swim Suit Special* and *Tomorrow Man*, to name a few. There were also Antarctic's *Ninja High School Yearbooks* and *Girls of Ninja High School* specials, where Dunn published strips contributed by fans of the series.

All Ninja High Art Ben Dunn/Copyright 1994 Ben Dunn and Antarctic Press

For most of its first 40 issues, *Ninja High School* concentrated on the triangle that Dunn set up between Jeremy Feeple, pacifist American teenager, Ichi-Kun Ichinohei ("Itchy Koo"), Japanese ninja and Asrial, a princess of the Salusian Galactic Order. Both Ichi and Asrial journey to America and Quagmire High School, intent on marrying Jeremy. From those "humble" beginnings, however, things have gotten a whole lot more...complicated. Dunn has introduced characters such as Magical Mimi, the teenage witch; Sammi Kondo, a Quagmire coed whose father makes her dress and behave as a boy; Professor Steamhead, Quagmire's resident eccentric scientist; Akura, a primitive from Guri-Guri Island who was briefly a rival with Jeremy for Ichi's affections before he and Jeremy became pals; and the spoiled, infinitely rich Lendo, who functions as a kind of Reggie to Jeremy's Archie.

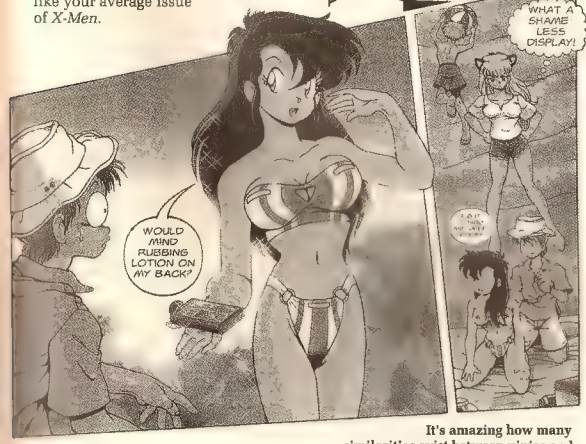
Ninja High School also shares with its manga inspiration a tendency toward ever more convoluted plots. Off-the-wall menaces lurk around every corner of Quagmire High. If it's not space-faring evildoers bent on universal conquest (starting with an American high school), it could be rats from Dimension X. Or it's time travelers from the future creating paradoxes at present day Quagmire with abandon. Or it's giant monsters wreaking havoc. Or its Mimi journeying to hell to try and save Jeremy's soul from the evil demon Stanley. Or perhaps it's Lendo accompanying Mimi to hell and getting stuck in a time loop only to return, years older than he was an issue ago.

Come to think of it, that also sounds like your average issue of *X-Men*.

WARNING
BULKHEAD OPEN
"THERE AMONG THE VAST SWIRLING SEA OF STARS... THERE IS BUT ONE PLACE IN THE UNIVERSE..."
"THAT I CALL HOME."
WHAT A SHAME LESS DISPLAY!

"It's meant to be fun," says writer/artist/publisher Dunn of *Ninja High School*, "to bring back a sense of participation that seems to be lacking."

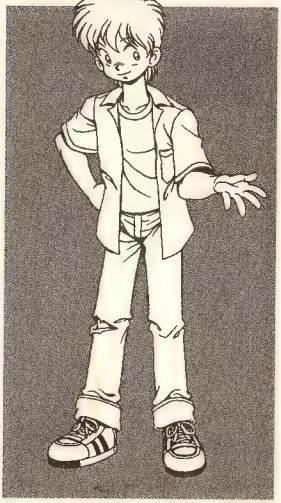
Design © Jayvalt Arts Kanpai



It's amazing how many similarities exist between ninjas and normal people. Even Ichi-Kun Ichinohei enjoys a good back rub.

"I'm emphasizing some of the characters I never had a chance to emphasize before. Like Ricky, Jeremy's little brother," Dunn says. "I'm trying to do stories that might appeal to a younger reader. Basically, I'm focusing more on the rivalry—Asrial is becoming more mature, becoming more of a leader. Ichi is attempting, harder than ever, to get Jeremy to make some sort of commitment. The biggest change will probably come with Jeremy, since I plan to make him a little bit less wimpy and more assertive. I haven't really explored many of the supporting characters," he laughs. "There will be plenty of issues to do that."

Antarctic Press Editor-in-Chief Herb Mallette wrote the script for issues #41-43 of *NHS*, and he lets slip a few details of the plot, which sees Sammi



Jeremy Feeple is a major target of Dunn's attention while he revamps *Ninja High*. "I plan to make him a little bit less wimpy and more assertive."

and the NHS gang meet up with the mysterious Y-Men. "That storyline is basically our homage/parody of the X-Men," he notes. "In high school, Ben drew a great many issues of a comic he called the Y-Men, which later became the Challengers. He was a big fan of the Chris Claremont/John Byrne *X-Men* and he used many of the storytelling and characterization techniques used in the *X-Men* in his work at the time. Over the years, as we've matured, we've seen *X-Men* change greatly. This storyline is our look at the X-Men and how they've changed.

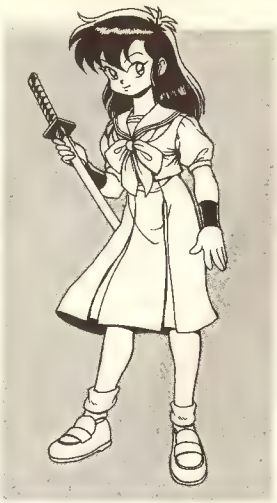
"In the storyline, Sammi encounters a group of students who, through quirky science, have been endowed with powers that set them apart from normal humanity. Destructo, a villain from the early years of *NHS*, returns in this storyline with his memory lost. The Y-Men try to get Destructo to function as a reasonable, nice guy. But his old personality continues to manifest itself despite his amnesia."

Mallette says, "This storyline is a parody—we'll have many of the superheroic kind of posing jokes. And moments of drama—the villain in the shadows looming over the heroes—which we'll twist around to make funny."

Dunn has made a trait of dropping cameo appearances by characters from other media into his stories. Tom Servo and Crow T. Robot from *Mystery Science Theatre 3000* have popped up in *NHS*, for instance, as have characters from *The Simpsons*, creatures from the *ALIEN* movies, characters from other Antarctic Press books, even Antarctic Press creators themselves. Characters, spacecraft and equipment from American movies and Japanese *manga* and *anime* also show up in *NHS* at the oddest moments. This aspect of the series will continue.

After the Y-Men comes Dog Supreme. He's another old *NHS* character, a cosmically powered, space-faring talking dog. Dog Supreme is stranded on Earth, his powers gone. Which probably explains why his old enemies, the Bark 2 Squad, pick that time to mount an attack.

Dunn adds, "I'm also crossing over *Gold Digger*, our first creator-owned series, into *Ninja High School*. *Gold Digger* will actually become a part of the official continuity, so that everything that happens in *Gold Digger* can affect *Ninja High School* and vice versa. That will be our first intra-company continuing cross-over." Characters from *Gold Digger* have already met the teens from Quagmire, in the Antarctic Press mini-series *A Science Affair*. (Just as the *NHS* gang met the characters from another Antarctic Press series, Ted Nomura's *Tigers of Terra: Families of Altered Wars* in the mini-series *Trouble with Tigers*.)



In continuing with his desire for change, Dunn reveals, "Ichi is attempting, more than ever, to get Jeremy to make some sort of commitment."

Asrial, a princess of the Salusian Galactic Order, will come into her own as a leader following issue #40.

Gold Digger is Fred Perry's creation, the story of archaeologist/treasure hunter Gina Diggers and her companion Werecheetah and sister named Cheetah. "*Gold Diggers* was an Antarctic Press series that didn't get much attention and started out with very low sales," Dunn says. "Fred is a great talent. I felt that he had the potential to create a series that was very fun, very involved, very unique...in terms of just his ability to take a very simple idea and make very unique characters. Now it's starting to get some prominence. I'm very happy about that."

Steve Ross has completed a script for a full-color *Magic Priest* mini-series. Magic Priest is a character introduced in *NHS* #37. Dunn will pencil that mini-series, and says, "The reasoning behind Magic Priest is that I was, quite frankly, tired of the way clergy were treated in comics. Having gone to a Catholic high school, it occurred to me that not all priests were bad. I decided to create a priest character who was not only good, but had power to back up what he said. Most of the time in comics, priests are either corrupted or helpless. I decided to do a priest character who was strong and not corrupted."

Dunn has stated that he plans to end *NHS* at issue #100. "I actually have an ending planned, for the original cast, anyway," Dunn says. "I figure that after 10 to 15 years, they've been in high school long enough." That doesn't preclude the possibility of a Ninja College, though.

The fans have been a big influence on Dunn's series. What other series dedicates an annual each year to publishing the strips that its fans have sent in? Many of those fans have gone on to write and draw the various *Ninja High School* spin-off mini-series that have cropped up during the comic's eight-year existence. And fans' suggestions often creep into *NHS* itself.

Dunn even set up a contest to let his fans determine just what happened to Lendo in Hell. (All Lendo said in the comic book was "[I've] gone through many adventures to get here.")

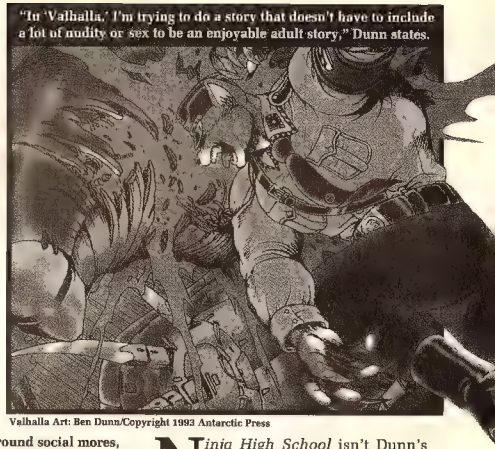
"First of all, I realize that it *is* just a comic series," Dunn admits, "and that the characters are not real. It's meant to be fun, to bring back a sense of participation that seems to be lacking in many comics these days. We try to get the reader actively involved, listen to what they have to say. We pay attention to the suggestions they make. The whole reason behind doing the yearbooks and the like was because I wanted our readers to actively participate in the series, and to get some experience and some exposure and to have fun. They know that when they pick up an *NHS* issue and they write in or they have a suggestion, they won't be ignored.

"Sometimes readers make suggestions on how storylines should go. Sometimes they make suggestions on how a character should act. Sometimes they introduce new characters. Sometimes they try to second-guess me on plotlines. By doing that, they force me to say, 'Well, I better not use that plotline.' There's a character who appeared in a yearbook called Boots, by a particular reader. He sent in so many stories revolving around that character, that I decided to go ahead and work her into the regular continuity. There are always little things that readers suggest that I can put in. Like one reader sent in a story about a dimensional, steam-powered transporter that I'll probably also use."

Dunn says, "As I do more and more issues, I become more and more in tune with what readers suggest because I feel that unless a creator is incredibly adept at creating new ideas, sooner or later he's going to start running dry. The only way to keep a series fresh is to get new blood and outside influences in." He says listening to and utilizing readers' suggestions keeps him fresh and prevents him from burning out.

Other *NHS* projects are in the works as well. A *Ninja High School* CD-ROM was produced for the Macintosh. The multi-media presentation features an adaptation of the first issue-and-a-half of *Ninja High School*, with limited animation of the comic's panels, as well as an audio-visual interview with Dunn.

Never one to dance around social mores, Dunn has even included a "cross dresser" in his team. Sammi Kondo—whose father makes her dress like a boy.


"In 'Valhalla,' I'm trying to do a story that doesn't have to include a lot of nudity or sex to be an enjoyable adult story," Dunn states.

Valhalla Art: Ben Dunn/Copyright 1993 Antarctic Press

The company is negotiating for the rights to distribute Japanese *anime* videos through Antarctic Press. And they're investigating producing their own animated videos, based on Antarctic Press properties. Dunn did have an agent in Japan negotiating for an animated series, but when those negotiations didn't seem to be proceeding quickly, Dunn pulled the license. Dunn also drew some storyboards for animator Will Meugniot (and Antarctic Press recently released a one-shot featuring the DNAgents, the creations of Meugniot and writer Mark Evanier) for another stillborn project. Another agent is putting together a proposal for a live-action *Ninja High School*.

Gold Digger Art: Pat Duke/Copyright 1994 Fred Perry

Explains Dunn, "I'm crossing over *Gold Digger*, our first creator-owned series, into *Ninja High School*." *Gold Digger* was created by Fred Perry.

Ninja High School isn't Dunn's only project. There are his periodic treks to Japan to acquire the American rights to Japanese comics. Antarctic Press is preparing to enter the superhero market, a move they envision making in 1995, and that's taking up his time.

And then there's the "Valhalla" storyline that Dunn has started in *Velvet Touch*, the adult anthology title that falls under Antarctic's Venus banner. (Antarctic started the Venus line after they had acquired the American rights to Japanese adult tales.) Dunn's tale of an alternate 1939 Germany doesn't seem to fit amongst the pornographic fantasies in the rest of the book. In *Velvet Touch* #1, you go from "Gillian's Island," Perry's lusty tale of a female Professor, Skipper and Gillian finding a young, "good to go" Thurston Howell III washed up on the beach, to Dunn's SF/superhero story of genetically engineered dog soldiers defending their Nazi masters from alien attack, to "Azzurp Spazio," Justin Blanco's story of a lizard-like alien's relations with a bank secretary. Dunn's is probably the best story of the bunch, but the most obvious difference between his story and the tales surrounding it is that Dunn's characters keep their clothes on. "I've never had much of a problem showing nudity in my books. I've never considered it much of a problem. Apparently, quite a few people do."

In fact, the biggest problem Dunn seems to have had with the Eternity folks is over the issue of nudity. Lesbian alien pirates Eternity had no problem with, but showing unclothed portions of the female and male anatomy they did. Go figure. Then again, *Ninja High School* has more

(continued on page 58)

Ninja

(continued from page 57)

sexual innuendo than most mainstream comics, so maybe Eternity felt a censor of some sort was necessary.

Dunn is content to act as his own arbiter of good taste. "In 'Valhalla,' I'm trying to do a story that doesn't have to include a lot of nudity or sex to be an enjoyable adult story. I'm emphasizing the strip's action/adventure aspect. This story concerns an alternate reality where aliens invade Earth in the 1930s. The Nazi regime is much more powerful in this universe than it was in our own, though Adolph Hitler didn't survive to rise to the power he did in our universe. Again, I'm de-emphasizing the political aspects of this strip and emphasizing the fantasy.

"With Antarctic Press, we've developed a very loyal readership base. And our readers are growing every month," Dunn says. "We've gotten this far and done real well. Even if we were not to change our books or our line-up at all, we could probably stick around for a long time."

Whether it's with *Ninja High School* or in Valhalla or some as yet undreamt-of project, Ben Dunn intends to stick around for a long time indeed. CS

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Kurtzman

(continued from page 19)

out to see Adele and me and have dinner.

CS: Did the Monty Python crew's approach to humor make you look at your own stuff in a new way?

KURTZMAN: I never really—I mean I liked the *Monty Python* show and it has made me laugh, but I could never relate to the humor. It was very literate. The Python group is very literate. I'm not. John Cleese is totally understandable for me and so is Terry, but the other three, Eric Idle, Graham Chapman, Terry Jones.... Jones' humor wasn't my kind of humor.

CS: Gilliam left *Help!* in 1965 and Robert Crumb was slated to be the next assistant. He showed up the day the office was being dismantled.

KURTZMAN: Yeah, it was something like that. Crumb knows the story better than I do. Crumb's work knocked me out, but unfortunately we weren't able to push it along because we went out of business.

CS: Was it fairly obvious that the magazine just wasn't making money?

KURTZMAN: Yeah. We had been working very hard and not getting results. We had to give up the ghost.

CS: It seemed like Warren saw it through for quite a while. Five years is a fairly long stretch. Was that the reason the magazine went from quarterly to bi-monthly?

KURTZMAN: We were always trying to find a formula that would give us survival.

CS: Did you ever have trouble getting distributors to handle *Help!* because the contents were so controversial?

KURTZMAN: No. I think the distributors gave us a hard time because there wasn't much money in *Help!*

CS: Do you think *Help!* failed because you overestimated your audience?

KURTZMAN: Maybe. The reasons are always mysterious as to why you, or why I [fail].

CS: While at EC, did you do some science fiction work?

KURTZMAN: I drew several science-fiction stories. I like science fiction very much. It was the kinky horror that really turned me off.

CS: You wrote "Man and Superman." Did you have to do much research on that?

KURTZMAN: Well, there was a certain amount of research, but the essence of the story was an idea that didn't have anything to do with what I had researched.

CS: It seemed to work—the payoff was beautiful.

KURTZMAN: Thank you. I enjoyed that story very much. We did good work. CS

Timewalker

(continued from page 24)

any one place. I keep hearing that old song, 'Lord I was born a travelin' man,' and it describes Ivar perfectly. We've seen how he was one of the Three Musketeers. If he ended up in France during the Reign of Terror, he would have to be the Scarlet Pimpernel; he's just that kind of guy."

Even though Timewalker has a heroic nature and the same durability as his brothers, Ivar is less experienced than Gilad or Armstrong, mostly because he hasn't lived as long.

"Because he has been bouncing around through time for a long while, Ivar is physically only about 400 years old when the series starts," Hall says. "Gilad and Armstrong are both about 10,000 years old, so Ivar is way behind them in that sense. However, he gets around, so he's probably just as worldly.

"In the series, he encounters them over and over, at various points in their lives," he adds. "They sometimes add to the paradoxes he lives with; Gilad and Armstrong remember things that haven't happened to Ivar yet. They generally get along pretty well."

Our goal is to tell the best, most exciting stories possible," Perlin says. "Page to page, panel to panel, I'll use different styles if that's what the story calls for."

"It can be harder as an artist writing for an artist, like in this case, because I see how I would draw the page and sometimes that gets in the way of my communicating with Don. I don't want to step on his toes creatively, because he's fantastic to work with, and that can happen if I'm trying to impose my vision on him. If I were a writer and not an artist, I would probably give him events and let him interpret them the way he wants. You would think we have a common language, as artists, but it really doesn't work that way."

"Bob's a very gifted guy, and very good to work with," Perlin says. "I can give him a couple of words or a part of a story and he'll have the whole thing worked out in no time. He listens and uses my ideas, which is great; you have to have that give-and-take in this business, to make a partnership work.

"I would like to add that [inker] Gonzalo Mayo has been incredible to work with on this book, too," Don Perlin adds. "He's from Cuba and doesn't speak much English, and I don't speak Spanish, but he takes the pages and turns out this incredible art."

"*Timewalker*'s going to be a dynamite book," Bob Hall promises. Readers are in for the time of their lives. CS

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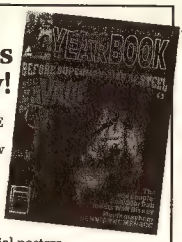

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Madman

(continued from page 29)

potluck approach to Madman. Whereas many artist/writers, especially those from the alternative circles, post a "No Trespassing" sign on their intellectual property, Allred enjoys having a friend or two (or 50) join in. In 1992, he published a Madman jam poster, including drawings from 38 artists. A contest invited fans to guess who drew what. "No one even came close to getting them all," says Allred. "The winner guessed 10 or 12 right."

Continuing in this tradition, Allred will keep the back cover gallery going and has invited other artists to collaborate on the book's covers. *Madman Comics #7*, for example, is slotted to be a "Steve Rude guest issue," based around the Moth and Silencer characters Rude created for Dynamic Forces' Creators Universe card series and featuring a Rude/Allred cover.

Allred also stands apart from many of his idols by embracing merchandising. "I like having orbiting items around *Madman Comics*," he says. "It makes it more fun to like the comic book."

Fun is really the operative word here. Along with the requisite PVC figure, *Madman* paraphernalia out or scheduled include a balsa glider, a squeaky toy and a metal lunchbox. Dark Horse is talking about things like Silly Putty and ViewMaster reels.

When Allred thinks merchandise, he clearly flashes back to his youth, when TV's *Batman* sparked a zillion toys and every comic book carried ads for doodads like X-Ray Spex. "I wish I could get in a time machine, go back and get all that stuff," Allred says with a wistful air. "Marvel used to advertise these transparent pillows with the characters printed on them. I've never even seen one for sale at a convention—maybe they all popped.

"Actually, somebody did send me some X-Ray Spex, so I finally got to see what they do. It was kind of disappointing."

OK, cross X-Ray Spex off the list. But not much else. Allred's in seventh heaven dreaming up freaky situations and funky spin-offs for his multi-suited character. He's following his heart, not the current superhero trends, and why not? His instincts brought him this far.

"Success won't affect the book," Michael Allred promises. "It has just charged me, made me more eager than ever to produce my own stuff rather than do work-for-hire." He pledges that with *Madman Comics*, there will be "no rules, barriers or borders. That's what controlling your own character means."

Now how cool is that? CS

Starman

(continued from page 11)

ducing them at a very regular rate. The work is striking, it's laden with shadow and mood, yet there's that comic-book dynamic that you need.

"I would go out on a limb here and say there are very few artists who do really dynamic painted covers. They often become such an exercise in paint that they lose their impact. Tony is excellent at the painted covers, and he has been given the green light to do them for the book, so that will be another element."

While Robinson has several other projects in the works, he plans to significantly scale back his workload in order to devote his attention to *Starman*. "By issue #6, this will be my *one* ongoing book," he declares. "I really want to try and make it the best comic I can.

"I'm currently doing *Firearm*, and while I will continue to be involved with Malibu Comics, I am beginning my final run on the book. I have a painted Batman/Deadman graphic novel, that I'm working on with John Estes, who's doing the painted *Tales to Astonish* book.

"That reminds me—I have written, and the artwork is coming in for *Tales of Suspense*, the Captain America/Iron Man graphic novel. Apart from that, I'm working on some creator-owned projects with Paul Smith, Bret Blevins and Steve Rude.

"The other thing I should mention is I have a graphic novel coming out from Kitchen Sink called *Illegal Alien*. It's a small black-and-white, it's set in 1960s London, it features aliens, the Kray twins, the CIA, KGB and mods and rockers and ice cream vendors. It's a quirky and exciting little book. I try to do something every year that doesn't make me any money, but has a good story that I want to get out of my system. I do them just for my own sanity and my own self-worth as a writer."

As for *Starman*, James Robinson hopes potential readers will give the book a try. "Some people—and I don't want to be so rude as to say *all* people," he notes, "buy comics out of an almost soap opera mentality, where it's just a compulsion to buy the next issue and then the next. If they stopped and thought about it for a moment, they could probably stop buying half those books, if they did so on the basis of if they still enjoyed them.

"I hope *Starman* is a book that fans will read as well as look at, and enjoy the stories as well as the artwork. It's the kind of book I would like to read. I'm trying to make it a singular work of quality, so that in 50 issues time, I can pat myself on the back and say, 'Yeah, that was good work, James.' " CS

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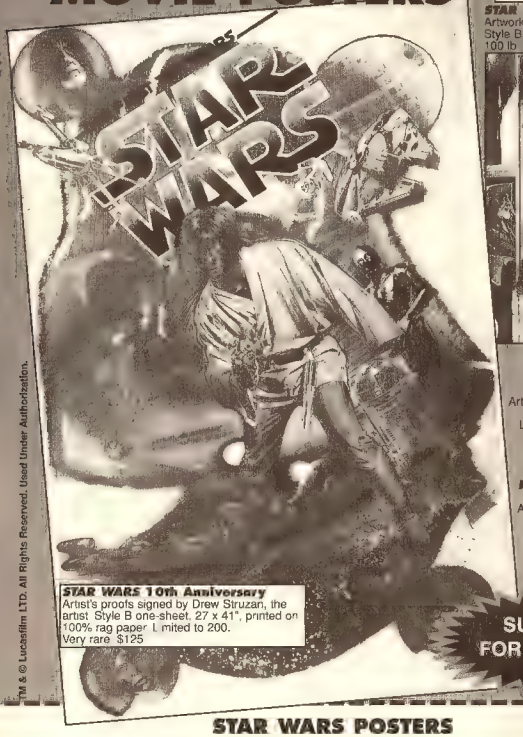

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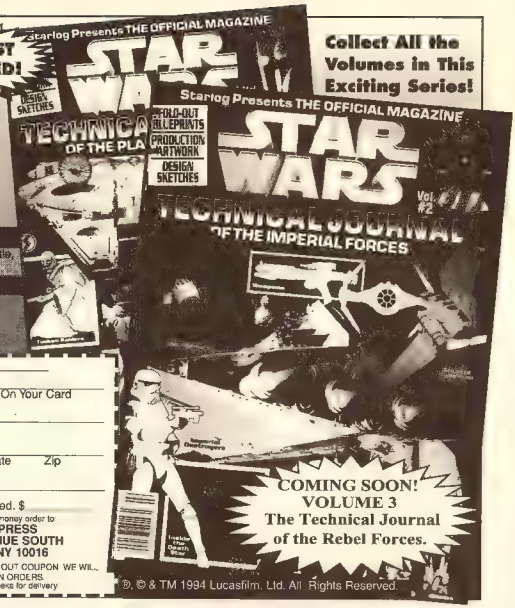

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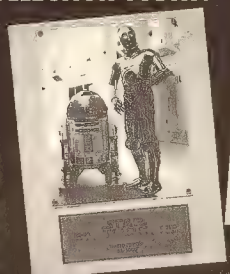

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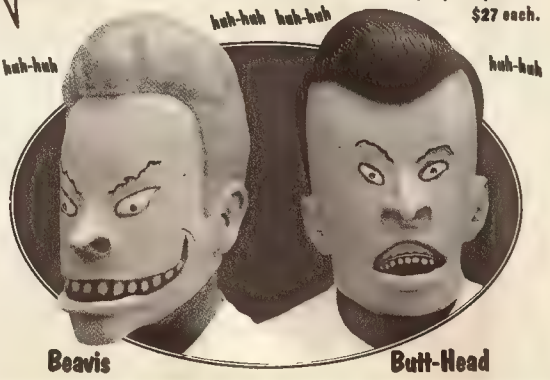

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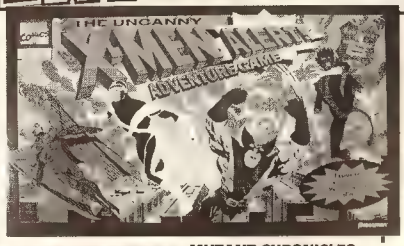

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Award-Winning Animation

Now that the awards season is over, let's see who won in the animation field.

The Oscar winner for Best Animated Short is *The Wrong Trousers*, produced by Nick Park of Aardman Animations Ltd. in Bristol, England. The animators won their first Oscar in 1991 for their stop-motion short, *Creature Comforts*.

Steven Spielberg's *Animaniacs* earned a Peabody Award, which honors excellence in radio and television. The award, named after the philanthropist George Foster Peabody, was given in May by the University of Georgia's Henry Grady College of Journalism.

At the 21st Annual Daytime Emmy Awards on May 21, *Animaniacs* scored in the categories of Best Music Direction and Composition (Richard Stone and Steve Bernstein, composers) and Best Original Song ("Animaniacs," the main title theme composed by Stone with lyrics by Tom Ruegger). Ray Bradbury won an Emmy for the Hanna-Barbera-produced *Halloween Tree*, for Best Writing in an Animated Program. Hanna-Barbera's *The Addams Family* was recognized, along with *The Ricki Lake Show*, for best Graphics and Title Design (Iraj Paran and Tom Wogatzke, graphic artists; James Hickey, title designer).

Rocko's Modern Life won for Film Sound Editing, for Michael A. Gollom, supervising sound editor; Timothy Borquez, supervising ADR editor; Michael Geisler, Tom Jaeger, Gregory La Plante, Kenneth Young, Timothy Mertens, Patrick Foley, sound editors; William Griggs, supervising music editor.

Show and performer categories were honored in ceremonies held May 25 in New York. The winner for Best Animated Children's Program was Nickelodeon's *Rugrats* (Vanessa Coffey, Gabor Csupo, Arlene Klasky, executive producers). This is the second Emmy for *Rugrats*. Congrats to all!

More Original USA Toons: This fall, *Highlander—The Animated Series* will premiere on the USA Network's Cartoon Express. Forty half-hour episodes are being made by Nelvana in Canada, in conjunction with Gaumont Television in Paris. Meanwhile, a third season of the live-action series begins this fall in syndication.

The cable network has ordered another 13 *Duckman* episodes from producer Klasky-Csupo, for a total of 26. This series focuses on an acerbic fowl detective (Jason Alexander).

USA has also commissioned Hyperion for a second season of *The Itsy Bitsy Spider*, 13 new segments. One episode, "Deep Space Itsy," spoofs *ALIEN* and *Terminator*. Captain Picard would have made an appearance in a sequence where the *Enterprise* rescues Itsy, but Patrick Stewart declined to have his image used again. Last season, "Itsy Does Hollywood" featured guest appearances by Picard and Data from *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. These were actually live-action clips taken from the "Deja Q" episode.

Hyperion is preparing 26 episodes of *Little Wizard Stories*, which are juvenile versions of L. Frank Baum's *Wizard of Oz* characters. The Oz Kids were designed by Ken Boyer, who designed most of the Tiny Toons for Spielberg. Boyer recently animated the treacherous hyenas for *The Lion Kingo*.

Bart Simpson vs. Superman: This fall, the Man of Steel faces his mightiest challenge yet, as *The Simpsons* returns to Sunday nights at 8 p.m. EST, battling *Lois & Clark* on ABC, *seaQuest* on NBC and *Murder, She Wrote* on CBS. Who will win?

Thumbs Up For *The Critic*: During the summer, ABC aired its final seven episodes. *The Critic* will move to Fox in January, with nine new episodes produced by Film Roman. Strategically, Fox will be showing it after another Gracie Films/Columbia TV series, *The Simpsons*. The producers are currently trying to cut costs by convincing the writers to minimize locations and reduce crowd scenes, which are very time-consuming and expensive to animate. Meanwhile, the Critic, Jay Sherman (voiced by Jon Lovitz), will also appear in an episode of *The Simpsons*.

Happy Anniversary, Gigantor: 1994 marks the 30th anniversary of *Gigantor*, the adventures of a boy and his robot—which happens to be the size of a skyscraper. You can credit *Gigantor* for launching an entire subgenre of SF-TV: giant robots—from the live-action *Johnny Sokko and his Flying Robot* and the animated *Frankenstein Jr.* to the giant mecha of today's *Transformers* and *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers*.

The Sci-Fi Channel currently airs *The New Adventures of Gigantor*, while Tokyo Movie Shinsha (TMS) has produced a new model, *Gigantor F/X*, yet to appear in the States.

Japanese *manga* artist Mitsuteru Yokoyama created *Iron*

Heigh-ho! It's off to the video store they go! These hard workers are on their way to pick up this week's release, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*.

Dwarfs Art: Copyright 1994 The Walt Disney Company

ANIMATION SCENE
Felix
the CAT
Felix the Cat returns this fall in CBS cartoon bumpers, a prelude to a possible new series.
Felix Art: Copyright 1994 Felix the Cat Creations, Inc

Film Roman color key stylist Phyllis Craig explains her craft.

Man 28 (In Japanese, "Tetsujin 28"). In his story, the mighty robot was built to battle Americans in World War II, being Japan's answer to the atom bomb. But the war ended before the robot could be utilized, and Iron Man 28 fought crime instead.

Producer Fred Ladd eliminated the Yankee-bashing angle and translated the series for American audiences as *Gigantor*. Because titanium is more durable than iron, Ladd redesigned the robot's metal skin as "titanite."

At the third annual Animagination Festival, John Kricfalusi gives career advice

"To make up for the lack of animation, we had to saturate the track with lots of talking and sound FX," Ladd says. For the voices, the producer used the same East Coast actors who had dubbed *Astro Boy* and *Kimba: The White Lion* for him. Billie Lou Watt (Astro Boy, Kimba) was Jimmy Sparks (a.k.a. Shotaro-kun), the kid controlling the giant robot; Cliff Owens was Inspector Blooper (a.k.a. Police Chief Otsuka); Gil Mack voiced Jimmy's mentor and the robot's inventor, Bob Brilliant (a.k.a. Dr. Shikashima); with Peter Fernandez as detective Dick Strong (a.k.a. Kenji Murasame. The detective also appears in Yokoyama's *manga* and *anime* versions of *Johnny Sokko*).

Originally, the 52-episode series had several two-part episodes. According to Ladd, some endings had to be reshot to make complete stories, because American syndicators frown on cliffhangers, multipart episodes and serials.

Because it is in black-and-white, among other reasons, *Gigantor* hasn't aired since the mid-1970s. However, Central Park Media is now offering vintage episodes in a five-volume series called *Gigantor Retrospective 30*, with two episodes per volume, $19.95 each.

In 1980, TMS produced a color version, 52 episodes, brought to America as *The New Adventures of Gigantor*. Again translated by Ladd, the series premiered last year on the Sci-Fi Channel. The modern version features Barbara Goodson (voice of Rita Repulsa in *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers* and Chris in *Lensman*) as Jimmy Sparks and Bonnie Brilliant, Doug Stone as Bob Brilliant, and Tom Wyner as Inspector Blooper.

Last year, TMS produced a *third* series: *Gigantor F/X*, which occurs a generation beyond the second series. Gigantor, it seems, isn't powerful enough to battle the state-of-the-art transforming mecha of the 21st century. So, a new, transforming Gigantor is constructed, this one controlled by a laser gun, operated by Jimmy Sparks' son. The original Gigantor occasionally appears to help Gigantor F/X.

TMS produced 47 episodes, which have yet to air here, though the Sci-Fi Channel may be a likely venue.

***Real Monsters* Unleashed:** This fall, watch out for 13 episodes of the latest Nicktoons. *Real Monsters* is produced by Klasky-Csupo, the studio responsible for *Rugrats*, *Duckman*, the first three seasons of *The Simpsons* and Lily Tomlin's two *Edith Ann* cartoon specials. Nickelodeon wasn't interested in cartoons with human characters, so Gabor Csupo pitched *Monsters* in a meeting with Nick exec Vanessa Coffey. She loved the designs and approved the concept. Interestingly, the monsters were drawn—on paper napkins.

Recently, Coffey formed her own production company, Toto Too Productions, to develop and produce live-action and animated TV programming.

The Return of Littlefoot: MCA/Universal Home Video has *officially* announced *The Land Before Time, Part II: The Great Valley Adventure*, continuing the exploits of Littlefoot and his prehistoric pals. It's the first of three sequels made exclusively for home video, to be released December 27 for $19.98. As reported earlier, Don Bluth isn't involved with the videos, which are being produced by Universal.

According to *The Hollywood Reporter*, many of the pros on *Land II* also worked on Bluth's *Land*. Not so. Most of the artists are Korean, not Irish or American. While storyboards, layouts and key poses were done at Universal Cartoon Studios in California, the inbetweening and coloring was done at Akom in Korea. The Koreans used the Bluth movie as a reference to animate their dinosaurs.

The original *Land* had been on video moratorium since 1992, but was rereleased July 13 for $19.98. But, if you can wait 'til November 18, McDonald's will be offering *Land*, plus *An American Tail: Fievel Goes West*, for $5.99 with a sandwich purchase. The offer includes a $2.50 rebate on the *Jurassic Park* video, plus a rebate on *Land II*. The promotion ends January 31, 1995.

Pre-production on *Land Before Time IV* has begun, on a story written by Dev Ross.

The Return of Felix the Cat: Film Roman is currently producing 50 five-second "bumpers" featuring the feline superstar, to air between cartoons on CBS this fall. These spots are meant to reacquaint kids with Felix, because a new series is in development for fall 1995. Phil Roman is personally producing and directing the spots to ensure they match the creative energy and style of the Felix shorts of the 1920s and '30s. He also wants to avoid the limited look and animation of the Trans-Lux 1960s version. The only way it will be updated is in Felix's environment and situations he would encounter in the 1990s. The studio is working in conjunction with Don Oriolo, who had inherited the rights to Felix from his father, the late Joe Oriolo. Created by Otto Messmer, Felix first appeared in 1919 in a four-minute, ten-second short, *Feline Follies*.

Felix fans can read his definitive history in *Felix: The Twisted Tale of the World's Most Famous Cat*, written by animator/historian John Canemaker, published in 1991 by Pantheon Books. The 191-page, lavishly-illustrated hardcover retails for $30.

Cats Dance for Ted Turner: After *The Pagemaster* is released this Thanksgiving, the next Turner Pictures animated project will be *Cats Don't Dance*, produced by David Kirschner and Paul Gertz. It's a story that echoes *Singin' in the Rain*, in which a cat named Danny (Scott Bakula) comes to Hollywood in 1939 to become a song-and-dance star.

During production on a scene involving Noah's Ark, Danny upstages the film's star, Darla Dimple (Ashley Peldon). Too bad for Danny, because Darla is not only a child superstar, she actually runs Mammoth Studios (to the chagrin of the real head, L.B. Mammoth, voiced by Ed Asner). If you cross Darla, she'll sic her gorilla bodyguard Max on you. Will Danny survive Darla's vengeful wrath? Will he triumph in show business? Will he even get feline star Sawyer (Natalie Cole) to no-

Animagination Photos: Sarah Baisley

tice him? We'll find out in December 1996.

Others in the cast include John Rhys-Davies as Willie, the elephant mascot of Mammoth Studios, Don Knotts as a turtle, Kathy Najimy, Hal Holbrook—and Arnold Schwarzenegger as Max. The screenplay was written by Cliff Ruby, Elana Lesser (former executive producers of *The All-New Ewoks*) and Roberts Gannaway, with music and songs by Randy Newman. The film is directed by Mark Dindal, with art direction by Brian McEntee.

Boasting a $35 million budget, *Cats Don't Dance* features full animation from a talented pool of animators formerly with Bluth and Disney, which includes Linda Miller, Skip Jones, Matthew Bates, Kevin Johnson and Matt O'Callaghan (creator of Hyperion's *Itsy Bitsy Spider*).

Artists With Animagination: For an animator struggling with deadlines and freelance assignments, it's tough to find time for a life beyond the drawing board. But some have found time for charity work, among them *Simpsons* producer David Silverman, *Jonny Bravo* creator Van Partible and *Ren & Stimpy* creator John Kricfalusi. They were the featured cartoonists attending the third annual Animagination Festival, sponsored by Youth Opportunities United, Inc. to benefit abused and neglected children in Los Angeles County.

"Animagination is done on the 20th Century Fox studio lot," explains Phyllis Craig, Color Key Supervisor at Film Roman. "We go out as a group of artists, and we entertain and work with about 400 foster children all under state care. They range in age from about seven or eight up through high school. Each year, every artist who has volunteered has come away feeling *very* good about themselves, having had a wonderful day, and feeling they really helped these kids."

The participating animators told the kids about their careers in animation, and provided encouragement for those interested in the field. At the Darryl F. Zanuck theater, they screened cartoons and after lunch, the kids visited exhibits by several studios. At each exhibit, artists drew the kids' favorite cartoon characters and answered their questions.

"One of the teachers who helped arrange all this is Idell Jamieson," Craig says. "We've gotten several letters from her naming children, and especially the older ones, who might have been gang-oriented. They may have been interested in art, but maybe never thought it was macho enough, or whether to make a living at it, or if they could achieve it. But through meeting our artists, talking with us, seeing how you can do it, it has literally changed their lives."

This year's Animagination was held May 14. Participating institutions included Hanna-Barbera, Rhythm & Hues, Rowland Heights High School, UCLA Graduate School of Film, Universal Cartoons, Warner Bros. and Spümco.

Photo: Sarah Baisley

Former heavyweight champ George Foreman (voicing a boxer on *Garfield*) meets the cat himself, the rarely photographed Lorenzo Music (voice of Garfield).

"It has been a really exhilarating experience," Craig says. "Everyone wants to do it again next year."

***Princess* on Parade:** One of the best places to publicize a film—and secure deals for its worldwide release—is at the annual Cannes Film Festival in France. Thus, Nest Entertainment committed $250,000 for a lavish party at the Castle La Napoule, to call attention to their animated fairy tale *The Swan Princess*.

Some 300 VIP guests—including executives from Fox and Paramount and their kids—were invited to attend. They were given a white box with a Swan sticker, which served as an i.d. tag. These were delivered by actors dressed as the film's stars, Prince Derek and Princess Odette.

Eight buses took the VIPs from the Carleton Hotel to the 13th-century Castle La Napoule. En route, the buses played *Swan* music interspersed with information about the trip, the castle and the movie. Upon leaving the buses, the formal-attired guests trod upon a red carpet the length of a football field, and were greeted by "Derek" and "Odette," as well as director Rick Rich and Matt Mazur of Nest. Mozart music played. In the garden area, *hors d'oeuvres* were served along with champagne, wine and soft drinks. There were balloons with *Swan* logos. Costumed characters—Puffin, Jean-Bob the frog, Speed the turtle and the villainous Rothbart—had their pictures taken with guests.

At 9:15, the hosts summoned everyone to the courtyard, where they showed an eight-minute film. This featured clips of John Cleese performing Jean-Bob, during an attempt to rescue the Swan Princess from a gator-infested moat. Also shown was a sequence involving Prince Derek hunting a shape-changer in the forest, and a musical show-stopper called "Princesses on Parade." The presentation ended with the impressive, computer-generated *Swan Princess* trailer shown in theaters last Christmas.

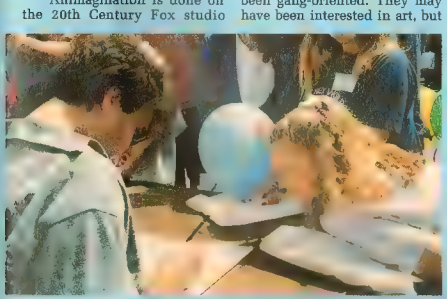
To cap the festivities, 10 minutes worth of fireworks blazed along the shore, with a display spelling out *The Swan Princess*.

The media's response? *Hollywood Reporter* rated it "five-out-of-five martinis." *Entertainment Tonight* said it was "the classiest party at Cannes."

So far, the number of licensees has reached 62 (compared to 20 for *Pagemaster*), to merchandise up to 900 *Swan Princess* items. And, Nest plans a *Swan* float for the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade, featuring the song, "Far Longer Than Forever."

Will all the hoopla be worth it? We'll find out when New Line Cinema releases *The Swan Princess* on November 18.

—Bob Miller



***Simpsons* producer David Silverman sketches for a young participant.**

Look for a new animated fairy tale, *The Swan Princess*, this November.

Swan Princess Art: Copyright 1994 New Line Cinema

COMICS REPORTER

Riddle Me This!

Holy cow and heavens to Betsy! It's rubber-faced Jim Carrey tickling the funny bone as the nefarious Riddler in *Batman Forever*. The rapidly rising Carrey, who toiled in low-budget filmdom—do *Once Bitten* and *Earth Girls Are Easy* ring a bell?—then scored big as one of the in-house members of television's *In Living Color* comedy ensemble. Then—Zocks!! Pow!!—came the big-screen double-whammy of *Ace Venture. Pet Detective* and *The Mask*, two huge hits which turned Carrey (profiled in CS #45) into one of Hollywood's hottest properties.

How hot?

So hot that hardly anyone—*Batman*-ophiles or industry types—blinked when it was announced that Carrey and not Robin Williams, the leading candidate, would tackle the part of the Riddler and join a cast that includes Val Kilmer as the Caped Crusader and Tommy Lee Jones as Two-Face. Carrey sounds positively thrilled, even a bit surprised, to be involved in the project. "[*Batman Forever* director] Joel Schumacher liked *Ace Ventura*. He had already been interested in me for the Riddler, but he thought I was a little too young," admits Carrey. "Then, when he saw the trailer for *The Mask*, he changed his mind. He said, 'OK, this is somebody who can do a lot of different things.' That's why I even got the opportunity to talk to him about doing it."

Mask Photo: K. Wright©Copyright 1994 New Line Cinema

In *Batman Forever*, Jim Carrey dons another mask. He's the Riddler.

Though filming hadn't begun at the time of this talk, Carrey had read the finished script and his brain was already swelling with notions of how to best bring the Riddler to vivid life. The actor had seen Frank Gorshin play the part to what most consider sardonic perfection, and the last thing he wants to do is copy Gorshin. Fortunately, the *Batman Forever* script goes into more revelatory character detail about the Riddler than the TV series ever did. Further, Carrey will share scenes with Kilmer, a much darker Batman than Adam West, and with Jones, who will most certainly give Two-Face the sly, menacing edge he brings to virtually all of his characters.

All of that has Carrey very excited. "The thing that's great about it is that within the script, you see where the Riddler comes from, how he's created. So, I'm just going to go with that and take it as far out there as I can," he promises, smiling just a bit evilly. "But I'm *not* going to imitate anybody. This Riddler will be *my* Riddler. And working with Tommy Lee Jones should be great. I've already got ideas in my head. It should be hilarious!"

—Ian Spelling

COMICS screen

All of these upcoming projects are live-action unless specified. Those boxed are new or updated since last listing. **Not everything listed will ultimately ever be made.** S: script; D: director; P: producer; EP: executive producer; C: creator; AN: animated; LA: live-action; Syn: syndicated; HB: Hanna-Barbera; Nel: Nelvana; WD: Disney; WB: Warner Bros.; PP: Paramount; U: Universal; Col: Columbia; Am: Amblin; DH: Dark Horse, L: Largo, QDE: Quincy Davis Entertainment. **Attn. all pros:** Info to be added to this list is cheerfully invited. Send to COMICS SCENE, 475 Park Ave. South, 8th Flr., NY, NY 10016 (Info as of 7/15/94)

The Airtight Garage. AN. EP: Kurosawa Ent. P: Philippe Rivier. D: Moebius, Katsuhiro Otomo. S: Randy Lofficier.

Aladdin. AN series.

Alfred E. Neuman. Film. P: Steven Haft, QDE.

Alias. Film. U. S: David S. Goyer. P: P. Lenkov, S. Daniel.

Annie. Film. Rastar.

Archie. Film. DIC.

The Badger. Film/TV. PP.

Barbarella. Film. Nel.

Baby Huey. AN. Syn TV.

❑ **Batman Forever.** Sequel. (see items)

Betty Boop. AN film. S: Jerry Rees. EP: R. Fleischer, R. Zanuck.

❑ **Biker Mike from Mars.** Film. P: Al Ruddy, Andre Morgan, David Chan. S: Greg Johnson

❑ **Blade.** S: David Goyer. D: Ernest Dickerson.

❑ **Blankman.** Film. Sony. (see article)

Blondie. Film. WB.

Broom Hilda. Film.

❑ **Cage.** P: Ed Pressman.

Casper. Film. Am/U. D: Brad Silberling. Summer '95.

Catwoman. Film. WB. S: Dan Waters.

Crying Freeman. Film. D: C. Gans. P: Brian Yuzna.

Daredevil. Film. D: Chris Columbus. Fox.

Deadworld. Film. S: Mark Pavia (D), Jack O'Donnell (P).

Batman's Reel Facts

With the next adventure in the Batman cinematic saga due to begin production this month, the rumors haven't ended. Various magazine, newspaper and TV stories have once again, like batwork, reported wildly erratic "facts."

Here's the *real* information, rather mundane compared to all the erroneous speculation published elsewhere. It's all detailed, all confirmed, and all, as far as COMICS SCENE can tell, true.

- ❑ The third film is now titled *Batman Forever*. It'll be shot in New York and California and released by Warner Bros. in June 1995.
- ❑ Joel Schumacher is directing. Profiled in STARLOG #155, Schumacher has also helmed *The Lost Boys*, *Flatliners*, *Falling Down* and, most recently, *The Client*.
- ❑ Tim Burton—who directed the first two films—is producing along with Peter MacGregor Scott—who did this summer's *Black Beauty*. Michael Uslan and Benjamin Melnicker serve as executive producers.
- ❑ The script is by Lee & Janet Scott Batchler. Akiva Goldsman has done rewrites. Final writing credits won't be determined for months.
- ❑ *Willow*'s Val Kilmer (STARLOG YEARBOOK #3) plays Batman and Bruce Wayne, succeeding Michael Keaton.
- ❑ Chris O'Donnell, seen in *The Three Musketeers* and *Scent of a Woman*, will play Robin.
- ❑ Tommy Lee Jones, an Oscar winner for his pursuit of *The Fugitive*, assumes the guise of Two-Face. (Billy Dee Williams, fans will recall, played D.A. Harvey Dent in the first film.)
- ❑ Jim Carrey (CS #45) is the Riddler. Once the likely choice, Robin Williams isn't doing the role. (See item).
- ❑ Nicole (*Far and Away*) Kidman plays the movie's female lead. Michael Gough and Pat Hingle will reprise their roles from the first two films, as, respectively, Alfred and Commissioner Gordon.
- ❑ Key creative personnel include encoring costume designer Bob Ringwood (STARLOG #143), production designer Barbara Ling, director of photography Stephen Goldblatt and editor Dennis Virkler. Elliot Goldenthal will compose the score. Merchandising and licensing deals are still being finalized.

—David McDonnell

Doom's IV. Film. P/S: Rob Liefeld. Am.
Double Dragon. Film.
Dudley Do-Right. Film. U.
Elektra Assassin. Film.
❑ **Elfquest.** AN film. P: Edward Pressman.
Fantastic Four. AN series. Debuts fall. Film in limbo.
Faust. Film. D: Stuart Gordon. S: David Quinn.
Felix the Cat. AN. Film Roman.
❑ **Fist of the North Star.** Film.
❑ **Ghost Rider.** Film. S: David S. Goyer.
G.I. Joe. Film.
Gothik. Film. P: Jeff Most.
Green Hornet. Film. U.
Hate. AN Film. S: Peter Bagge. Colossal Pictures.
Incredible Hulk. Film. U. P: Gale Anne Hurd.
Inspector Gadget. Film. S: J. Loeb III, M. Weisman. U.

Photo: Brian McLaughlin/Fox

Acting heroically in his Sam Hamm-Sam Raimi-created Fox TV series, Carl Lumbly is *M.A.N.T.I.S.*

❑ **Iron Man.** AN series. Debuts fall.
Jonny Quest. AN & LA films.
❑ **Judge Dredd.** Film. W/Sylvester Stallone, Armand Assante, Diane Lane. S: Bill Wisher. D: Danny Cannon. Now shooting. Summer '95 bow.
Kull. Film. U. S: C. Pogue.
Li'l Abner. Film. P: Ernest Chambers.
Lt. Blueberry. Film. P: Eclectic Films.
❑ **Little Lulu.** AN. Lulu: Tracey Ullman.
Machine. Film. P: Larry Gordon. DH. U.
❑ **M.A.N.T.I.S.** TV series. Fox. Airing.
The Men in Black. Film. Col.
❑ **Mickey Mouse.** New AN theatrical shorts. WD. Debut summer 1995.
Mr. Magoo. Film. Am/WB.
Modesty Blaise. Film. Miramax. P: Marcelo Anciano, Michael Berrow.
❑ **Mortal Kombat.** Film. P: Larry Kasanoff.
Pagemaster. AN/LA film. D: Joe Johnston. Fox/HB. X-Mas.
Peanuts. Film. P/S: John Hughes. WB.
The Phantom. Film. PP. AN series: *Phantom 2040*. Debuts fall.
Pit Bulls. Film. P: Larry Gordon. DH. U.
Plastic Man. Film. WB/Am.
Pocahontas. AN film. WD.
Prince Valiant. Film. S: M. Beckner, Roger Kumble, Marlene King. N. Constantin.
Reid Fleming. Film. WB.
Richie Rich. Film. P: Joel Silver, J. Davis. D: Don Petrie. W/Macaulay Culkin. XMas.
The Saint. Film. PP.
Sandman. Film.
Sgt. Rock. Film. P: Joel Silver. S/D: John Milius. WB.
Sheena. TV series. Col.
Sin City. S: Frank Miller.
❑ **Speed Racer.** Film. D: Alex Proyas. S: J.F. Lawton. WB.
❑ **Spider-Man.** AN TV series. Fox. Spidey: Christopher D. Barnes. LA Film. D: Jim Cameron.
Spy vs. Spy. Film. S: Gene Quintano. P: Steven Tisch, QDE.
Street Fighter. LA Film. S/D: Steven E. de Souza. W/Jean-Claude Van Damme, Raul Julia.
Stretch Armstrong. Film. D: Jay Dubin. S: Mike Werb, Michael Colleary.
Superman. TV series. ABC.
❑ **Tank Girl.** Film. D: Rachel Talalay. S: Tedi Sarafian. W/ Lori Petty, Malcolm McDowell. P: Trilogy Ent. UA. Shooting.
❑ **Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles.** A fourth LA film. New Line.
Terry & the Pirates. TV.
❑ **Timecop.** Film. DH/L. U. September release.
V for Vendetta. Film. S: Hilary Henkin. D: Brett Leonard. P: Joel Silver.
Virus. Film. DH. S: Chuck Pfarrer. P: Gale Anne Hurd. U.
W.I.L.D. Cats. AN series. CBS.
X. Film. P: Larry Gordon. DH. U.
X-Men. Film. Fox. P: Lauren Shuler-Donner. S: Andrew Kevin Walker.
Zen. Film. Shooting December.
Zorro. Film. D: Mikael Salomon. TriStar. S: Terry Rossio, Ted Elliott. AN TV series. Imagination F. Calico.

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Bat Maker

I'll tell you the strangest thing about it for me, and this will seem extraordinarily naive," says Joel Schumacher of the pressure of picking up the directorial reins of the *Batman* franchise from Tim Burton. "When Bob Daly and Terry Semel, who run Warner Bros.—or as Tim calls them, 'The Brothers'—offered me *Batman*, I thought 'Wow, to do a *Batman* would be so great.' The Batmobile. The fun part of it, which is the filmmaking part. But then I thought, 'Gee, is anybody interested in a third *Batman*? Maybe no one is interested.' "

Well, one person for certain is not interested in *Batman Forever*—Michael Keaton. "I had no idea that if we lost a mug we would be in the papers every day," says Schumacher. "It's exciting, but also a lot of pressure to be a part of something that's getting so much attention. I would like to do a great job. I'm planning to do a great job. I *hope* to do a great job, but I feel it will all be under a microscope."

Schumacher isn't kidding. *Batman Forever*, which is now filming in New York and Los Angeles, has been, and will continue to be, under tremendous scrutiny. The production has lost far more than just a mug. First, Burton is not behind the camera, but is serving as a producer, so *Forever* will retain something of the trademark dark Burton tone. Second, Schumacher brings to the table his own visual style, which has been on view in such films as *The Lost Boys* and *Flatliners*, as well as a talent for making the dark somehow commercial. The most glaring changes, of course, are in the casting. Gone is Keaton as the Caped Crusader. In is Val Kilmer, best known for his work in *Top Secret*, *Top Gun* and *The Doors*. Out is Robin Williams, who most figured a shoe-in for the part of The Riddler. In is Jim Carrey, blazingly hot off *Ace Ventura: Pet Detective* and *The Mask* (see related item).

Also in is Tommy Lee Jones as Harvey Dent, a.k.a Two-Face.

The director explains that he's quite pleased with the actors he has cast. Jones, who just starred in Schumacher's adaptation of the bestselling legal novel *The Client*, didn't require much arm-twisting to sign on. Carrey was the right man at the right moment. And Kilmer's casting, after negotiations with Keaton broke down, seemed to breathe new life into the *Batman* saga. "I went to meet with Tommy to do my spiel to get him to do the role," remembers Schumacher. "I got there and [Jones' 11-year-old son] Austin had a pile of *Batman* comics with a Two-Face cover on top. Tommy told me he would do the film because it's Austin's favorite. Jim Carrey is just perfect. He's hip and funny and he looks like he's made of rubber. He'll be great."

And what about Kilmer replacing Keaton?

"I had Tonya Harding break Michael's legs," jokes the director. "Michael had already made two *Batmans*, so there were considerations, consequences and problems that he had coming into this one that I didn't know anything about. His considerations were financial, contractual and 'lifestyle considerations,' as he called them, about scheduling and timing things. When someone has a lot of considerations, you start having considerations about whether you want somebody in anything with considerations.

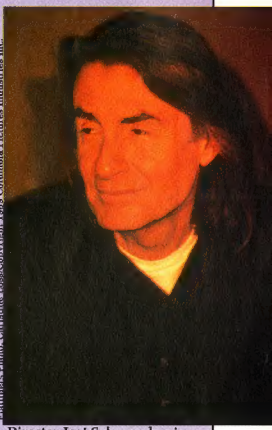


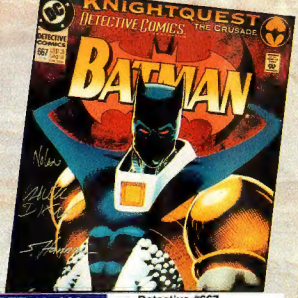
Photo: Barbara Kinney/Batman Forever ©1994 Columbia Pictures Industries, Inc.

Director Joel Schumacher is now the man in charge of the Dark Knight's film fate.

You want somebody who will give 100 percent. Around Christmas time [1993] I saw *Tombstone* [the Wyatt Earp film in which Kilmer played Doc Holliday]. Val just blew me away. I had been watching his work for years. I know him. So I thought, 'If anything ever happens and Michael is not going to do *Batman*, wouldn't it be great with Val?' I started falling in love with a fresher approach to the whole franchise."

—Ian Spelling

Signed COMICS COLLECTIBLES



SET #1: $40

X-Force #1
Autographed by Fabian Nicieza. Limited Edition of 2,500.

X-Men #1
Autographed by Chris Claremont. The most popular Superhero team in comicdom.

SET #4: $80

Batman #497
Autographed by Jim Aparo, Doug Moench, Dick Giordano & Kelley Jones. This is the back breaking issue in the Knightfall saga. Limited Edition of 9,000.

Detective #667
Autographed by Chuck Dixon, Graham Nolan & Scott Hanna. First in the Knightfall series. Limited Edition of 5,000.

SET #2: $60

Man of Steel #30
Autographed by Jon Bogdanove & Dennis Janke. The first color-form cover ever done.

Mighty Magnor #1
Autographed by Sergio Aragones. The first pop up comic cover ever done.

Protectors #5
Autographed by RA Jones and Tom Derenick. The first force beam hole ever done.

SET #5: $40

Death of Superman Poster Kit
Two posters commemorating the death of Superman, earth's greatest hero. Each is autographed by Dan Jurgens, artist & writer. One poster depicts the funeral with many of the characters in the DC Universe. The other poster is a reproduction of Death of Superman, in issue #75 cover. Each poster is a Limited Edition of 5,000.

SET #6: $40

Legacy of Superman #1
Autographed by Curt Swan & Dan Jurgens. Issued in 3/93. Limited Edition of 5,000.

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Autographed by Terry Austin. Issued in 1986. Superman battles a Cyborg villain with a Kryptonite heart. The old Luthor makes an appearance. Limited Edition of 2,500.

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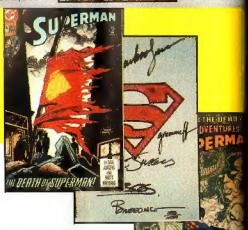

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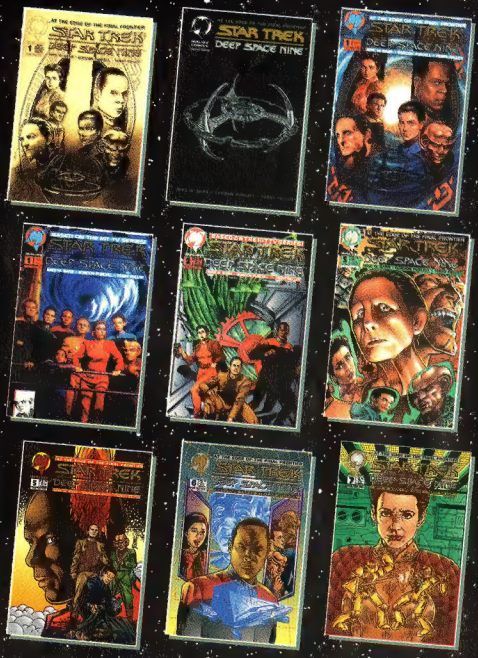

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___ Bi-Weekly ___ Monthly

2 Yes or No, should Wolverine get his adamantium skeleton & claws back?

___ Yes ___ No

3 Do you think Spider-Man should stay married or get a divorce from Mary Jane?

___ Stay Married ___ Get a Divorce

4 Marvel is only publishing one Wolverine title per month. Would you buy two Wolverine titles per month?

___ Yes ___ No

5 Do you like Sabretooth better as a hero or as a villain?

___ Hero ___ Villain

6 Who are the three X-Men characters you would like to see get their own title?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

7 Would you like to see a marriage between Rogue and Gambit?

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